



DEBATES
OF THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

DAILY HANSARD

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24 March 2026

This is an **EDITED PROOF TRANSCRIPT** of proceedings that is subject to further checking. Members' suggested corrections for the official *Weekly Hansard* should be lodged in writing with the Hansard office no later than **Tuesday, 14 April 2026**.

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Tuesday, 24 March 2026
The Assembly met at 10.00 am.

(Quorum formed.)

MR SPEAKER (Mr Hanson) (10.01): 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.

Regional plans—Tuggeranong

Ministerial statement

MS CHEYNE (Ginninderra—Manager of government Business, Attorney-General, Minister for Human Rights, Minister for City and government Services and Minister for the Night-Time Economy) (10.01): I am pleased to provide an update to the Assembly on projects and commitments within my ministerial responsibilities being delivered by the ACT government in the Tuggeranong region. ACT Labor took an extensive regional plan to the 2024 election for Tuggeranong that focused on revitalising the region through improved connectivity via path and road improvements, safer and enhanced public spaces and upgraded community infrastructure.

Residents of Tuggeranong would have been pleased to hear earlier this year that the development application for the Athllon Drive duplication has now been approved. The project will deliver duplication of approximately 2.4 kilometres of the southern section of Athllon Drive between Sulwood Drive and Drakeford Drive in Tuggeranong, helping to reduce congestion and improve travel reliability between Woden and Tuggeranong. Enabling works for the project are complete and have included widening and lighting upgrades to the C4 community path between Atkins Street and Drakeford Drive, new footpath connections and improvements to minor shared paths. With the DA now approved, a tender for the main construction works is scheduled to be released in the coming weeks, with construction expected to commence later in the year once that contract has been awarded.

In developing this project, we have worked hard to minimise impacts to mature native and hollow-bearing trees, retaining 93 per cent of the 560 mature native trees identified in the area, including those with the highest value hollows. To offset the removal of 319 trees, including 39 mature native trees, the project will plant 617 native trees, 650 medium-sized native shrubs and over 20,000 native grasses, low shrubs and

wildflowers. This is more than a 2:1 replacement ratio and reflects the ACT government's commitment to ecological restoration and habitat connectivity.

Further east, the significant Monaro Highway upgrade continues to progress well. The new southbound Lanyon Drive flyover remains on track to open to traffic by the end of 2026, with construction on other project packages continuing beyond this timeframe. Construction of the eastern side of the new Dog Trap Creek Bridge has been completed, and concrete has been poured for the new flyover and interchange at the intersection of Lanyon Drive and the Monaro Highway in Hume. Once complete, the upgrade will improve road safety and reduce travel times for commuters and freight along this key transport corridor.

Upgrades to Sulwood Drive to improve safety for residents and visitors accessing the Mount Taylor Nature Reserve, whether by driving, cycling or walking, have been delivered. These upgrades include newly rehabilitated road pavement, traffic lights, a shared path and improved access to the car park at the base of Mount Taylor. While I am not a southside or a Tuggeranong resident or a Kambah resident, I would note that my colleagues, Mr Werner-Gibbings and Ms Tough as well as Minister Steel, have all given me extensive positive feedback and positive feedback that they have heard about what the rehabilitated road has delivered in terms of travel experience.

Safety improvements have also been completed at a number of intersections in Tuggeranong, including Tharwa Drive and Norman Lindsay Street at Lanyon Marketplace and Tharwa Drive and Lawrence Wackett Crescent in Theodore. These projects were jointly funded by the ACT and Australian governments under the commonwealth's Infrastructure Investment Program.

As committed in our regional plan, a \$5 million fund has been established to invest in better footpaths across Tuggeranong. This funding will support the construction of new footpaths, missing links and improvements to existing ones, making suburbs more accessible and better connected. To provide just one example, this funding will enable the delivery of missing links in the C5 Principal Route connecting Tuggeranong town centre, which builds on earlier completed works as part of the Athllon Drive duplication. Similarly, we are delivering on our commitment to upgrades and improvements that enable safer travel across the path network in Tuggeranong, with the construction of raised pedestrian crossings, pedestrian islands and kerb ramps delivered in Gowrie and with construction starting in Kambah in the coming weeks. A \$2.5 million fund to improve street lighting across Tuggeranong—making it safer and easier for residents to move around—was also promised, and it has been established. Roads ACT is in the final stages of prioritising sites, with a focus on addressing lighting in poorly lit public areas, enhancing access to essential services such as public transport and improving passive surveillance.

The government remains committed to building on recent upgrades to deliver further improvements to the Tuggeranong Foreshore, connecting Lake Tuggeranong to the upgraded Tuggeranong town centre, and I look forward to updating the Assembly in due course.

Just next to the lake, the Parks and Conservation Service has worked with Ngunnawal and the broader community to restore endangered ecosystems and waterways within

the Urambi Hills Nature Reserve. This included replacing woody weeds with native shrubs and wildflowers, improving ecological connectivity for local wildlife and enhancing habitat for threatened species and pollinators. Members in this place will be aware that we have re-naturalised part of Tuggeranong Creek and have constructed two new viewing platforms in Calwell to allow people to enjoy local wildlife.

Further afield, the ever-busy Parks and Conservation Service has also undertaken a full restoration of Ready-Cut Cottage in Namadgi, completed in collaboration with Craft and Design Canberra. Works included treatment of lead paint and asbestos and both internal and external refurbishment. Members of the community seeking to enjoy views of the Gudgenby River and local wildlife will be able to book accommodation at this historic residence from 13 April this year.

Returning to the suburbs, a strong theme throughout our regional plans is a focus on delivering suburban infrastructure upgrades across Canberra. This includes improvements to public spaces at local shops, with the aim of encouraging greater use and enjoyment of these spaces, supporting local businesses and encouraging people to shop local. In Tuggeranong, works have now been completed at Lanyon, Calwell and Monash shops, improving accessibility and enhancing the overall look and feel of these important community hubs. Planning is now underway for public space upgrades at Erindale and Chisholm shops, with a design consultant recently engaged to progress this work.

I would like to thank Mr Werner-Gibbins for his significant engagement on the Erindale shops. He has done a mountain of work to talk to his local community about these upgrades and what they can look like. I acknowledge that the report that he has tabled in this place and provided to my office has considerable and rich detail, and I greatly appreciate it. I also thank Ms Tough for her significant engagement on the Chisholm shops. Locals and shoppers can rest assured that the many conversations had by Ms Tough—come rain, hail or shine—are thoughtfully brought to the attention of my office and me. I look forward to working with Mr Werner-Gibbins and Ms Tough as we deliver on these commitments and others.

No talk of suburban infrastructure would be complete without mentioning our play spaces. We remain committed to improving play facilities across Canberra, including Kambah, Wanniasa, Bonython, Isabella Plains, Gilmore and Conder. I can confirm that planning and design are currently underway for upgrades to these playgrounds, and we look forward to releasing that soon. The government also undertakes an annual program of minor improvements across Canberra, and this will continue. In 2025, Point Hut District Park received minor upgrades to ensure safety compliance, including the installation of a new climbing unit.

We have also delivered on our commitment to build a new fenced dog park in the Lanyon Valley. The new Lanyon dog park, located on the corner of Woodcock Drive and Jim Pike Avenue, opened in November, complementing the existing dog exercise area, which is staying as a dog exercise area. It is over 3,600 square metres in size and it includes two separate grassed play areas for small or older dogs and for larger dogs. Last, but not least, some additional seating and desk spaces will soon make Tuggeranong Library an even better place for working, meeting and relaxing.

I look forward to continuing to progress and deliver this Labor government's commitments across the regional plans that we took to the election. I have no doubts that Mr Werner-Gibbings and Ms Tough will continue their significant advocacy on behalf of the Tuggeranong community, and I look forward to working with them and my colleagues to deliver our progressive and practical plan for Tuggeranong.

I present the following paper:

Update on Weston Creek and Woden & Molonglo Regional Plans—Ministerial statement, 24 March 2026.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

MR PARTON (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (10.11): I want to thank the minister for updating the chamber on the things that are being done in this space. We look forward to the Athllon Drive duplication. We look forward to the upcoming works on the C4 community path. I know everyone in the south is also anticipating the completion of the Monaro Highway upgrades—something that we also must thank the Morrison government for. But, based on this statement, I am gathering that the only people we thank are Labor people. Mr Werner-Gibbings and Ms Tough are mentioned a number of times during the statement, and it seems that Ms Tough and Mr Werner-Gibbings are the only two members of this place who are standing up for Tuggeranong.

I want to draw the attention of members to the glaring omission in this statement for the great advocacy work done by my Greens colleague Miss Nuttall. I think she has done well. I think she has raised a lot of issues that, despite the fact that Ms Cheyne has not mentioned it in her statement, I think have come to the attention of the government, and I would like to believe that the advocacy from my colleague Miss Nuttall has also contributed. According to Ms Cheyne, there are only two local members in Tuggeranong—and that is simply not the case.

I can see that Ms Tough and Mr Werner-Gibbings, according to Ms Cheyne, have specifically contributed feedback to some projects that they may have magically been on the agenda of the minister, and that is great. But the reality in the south is that Miss Nuttall, Ms Morris and myself are speaking loudly and proudly for Tuggeranong. I would ask that the minister step into the front bar of the Kambah Inn on Friday night and ask the customers to nominate which MLA is best representing them, because I do not reckon their response is going to line up with the ministerial statement.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS (Brindabella) (10.13): Minister, I thank you for your detailed update this morning about how the ACT government is delivering ACT Labor's plan for Tuggeranong. We have the list of the commitments up in my office, and the amount of red ink that we have been able to use for projects delivered and funding committed is extremely motivating. It is clear just how much work is happening across Tuggeranong. I want to acknowledge the scale of it and the effort that you and your directorate are putting in.

Many of these projects are things the community in Tuggeranong has been calling for. So it is encouraging to see real progress upon them taking shape. Residents in Kambah, Wanniasa and Oxley, particularly, have been watching the Athllon Drive duplication with close interest. They will be pleased to hear that the development application has now been approved. The enabling works have been completed, including the lighting upgrades on the C4 path and the new footpath links, which shows the community that this project is moving forward.

In December I spoke with Simone, who is a cyclist who uses the route regularly and is really appreciative of the new path. She said, “I had a couple of trips on the new path this week and it is pretty nice. It is super to see it now. It has streetlights all the way. It is very smooth and fast.” I did a little bit of training in January and February on that path and a couple of rides with Tuggeranong Pedal Power members. It is a very smooth and relatively very fast cycling path. It is an excellent exit out of Tuggeranong into Woden.

I also, Minister, appreciate the care taken with the environment. I think retaining 93 per cent of the mature native trees and committing to more than two to one replacement of over 600 new trees demonstrates to the community that road improvements and ecological stewardship can and do go hand in hand.

I will highlight the upgrades to Sulwood Drive for the Assembly. This is exactly the kind of improvement that makes an immediate difference. The improved car park beneath Mount Taylor, new traffic lights, the shared path—which is also actually the new cycle path, which is a really, really lovely ride—and, most recently, the rehabilitated pavement have made it safer for everyone. I think the decision to close Sulwood Drive entirely in late November last year after underground problems were found was a good one. The improvement works were done quickly and ensured the least amount of disruption possible—with the road back open before Christmas. Once it opened in mid-December, I received many messages welcoming the upgrades. Courtney said, “I drove on it yesterday. It is brilliant. Thank you for your fast action to get this all organised.” Jane, a long-term resident of Kambah, told me, “It has never been this good in its entire life.”

On the other side of Tuggeranong, the Monaro Highway upgrade continues to be one of the biggest infrastructure projects we have seen. The work at Lanyon Drive, the new flyover and the Dog Trap Creek Bridge are major projects. They have caused some disruption, but we locals are looking forward to the payoff of safer travel, better freight movement and shorter, more reliable trips. It is also good to hear that the southbound flyover remains on track for completion in 2026.

On suburban upgrades, I am really pleased to see the works completed at Lanyon, Calwell and Monash shops. These are places where people gather, and improving accessibility, safety and amenity helps local businesses and strengthens community connection. It is welcome news that planning has begun for upgrades to the Erindale shop public precinct and the Chisholm shops as well. Thank you, Minister, for acknowledging the community engagement that I have undertaken. I think the fact that more than 420 people made detailed submissions about these upgrades to me when I ran a survey over the Christmas break makes clear that there is serious community interest and investment in this project. People around both centres care deeply about

their shops, and it means a lot to them that their voices are being heard and they are being offered an opportunity to engage as the designs are being developed.

Even the small things matter. For the benefit of the Assembly, I will not repeat everything the minister has outlined this morning, but these are touches that make a community more welcoming and more useful. The government is delivering thoughtfully and across a wide range of areas to put Tuggeranong back on the map. Tuggeranong residents will recognise many of these projects because they are seeing them take shape in real time. They are not just part of the comprehensive plan that we took to the 2024 election; now, they are improvements that have been delivered that people see every day.

Thank you, Minister, for the clarity you provided today and for your ongoing commitment to these projects. This is exactly the sort of interest and investment Tuggeranong needs and deserves, and it is very motivating to see it happening. We are looking forward to what is next.

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (10.19): I thank the minister for her update on the Tuggeranong Regional Plan. It is helpful to understand where business as usual investment sits in Tuggeranong. Unfortunately, we have only had access to this statement for about an hour and 20 minutes, so my comments will have to be brief. They will be unsurprising to members because I think we are all realising that the core of ministerial statements is what is left unsaid.

A theme in this particular statement, frankly, appears to be the lack of ambition for Tuggeranong. While we are grateful for the investments in environmental restoration, play spaces, facelifts for shop facades, paths and roads, they are not dissimilar to business as usual. Forecast upgrades are far more meaningful when government does community consultation. On the other hand, we have seen a few well-intentioned upgrades recently that have not in fact been well received by the community because they do not feel asked or indeed listened to.

I would argue that the most iconic upgrade we got from Lanyon shops was in fact Benchy McFail, RIP. I would like to thank Mr Parton for his community building efforts there. Water's Edge residents did not get much consultation on the path proposed right outside their homes that was looking to be a safety hazard until they wrote a petition to get the government to listen. Letters did not seem to do the trick. Kambah residents were quite miffed that land zoned for community use went up for expressions of interest without any kind of community needs assessment being done. The government, I believe, extrapolated a needs assessment from Gungahlin but correct me if I am wrong, it has been a while on that one.

The Lanyon dog park was not smooth sailing. There was rampant confusion for a while about how dogs and their owners could expect the area they used for dog walking to remain, or in fact, not remain, and despite us writing letters to the minister asking for clarification, at times we were still hearing answers to our questions through the media first. I do thank Mrs Morris and Ms Tough for their advocacy for their constituents and remain of the view that the government should actually just have listened to dog park users in the first place.

We welcome the re-naturalisation of the Tuggeranong Creek around Calwell. Of course we do; it was my Greens colleague, the former minister for water, Mr Shane Rattenbury, who made that happen. It is disappointing that the last shovel-ready project on that list, reconnecting the old Tuggeranong Creek line in Richardson, is now apparently a twinkle in this government's eye because on their own, this Labor government has not prioritised getting any more funding for the Healthy Waterways Program.

And hey, maybe I am also a bit bitter because no one in this Labor government seems to want to mention that we moved an entire motion calling on the government to do everything they can to fix Richardson shops, and after six years there is finally movement. It would be great if this ACT Labor government could at least bring the bin back around that area and ask their federal colleagues to restore the post box. It is the little things in life.

I do want to thank Mr Parton for the warm shout-out. I see the work that he and Mrs Morris do. I know how punishing Mr Parton's doorknocking schedule is and how much work each and every local member puts into Tuggeranong. All this to say, I wonder if this Labor government might find it easier to retain the trust and belief of their Tuggeranong constituents if they are prepared to recognise the full story—including the times that consultation did not happen or was not necessarily listened to, so they can learn and consult better—including the pieces of work members other than their own Labor colleagues have done to make Tuggeranong a better place.

MS TOUGH (Brindabella) (10.22): I too wanted to add my voice as a member for Brindabella and thank Minister Cheyne for this statement.

I note that it is an update on the government's implementation of ACT Labor's Tuggeranong Regional Plan, the plan that ACT Labor consulted on in 2024 and took to the election as our election commitments for the 2024 election. So, I mean, that kind of explains why it is the Tuggeranong Regional Plan update. Mr Werner-Gibbins and I, along with our fellow candidates and members back in 2024, knocked on doors and spoke to people across Tuggeranong, across Brindabella, about what they were looking for. We put that into a document together and then we went out and campaigned on it. This is reflecting on how that has then been implemented by the ACT Labor government. So thank you, minister, for bringing this statement and this update.

I wanted to start by talking about playgrounds because in 2024 it was definitely something that was brought up with me constantly, every day. I know I put a Facebook post up recently about playgrounds and once again have been given a whole list of ones to go check out and thoughts on playgrounds. As a mum myself who has used a lot of playgrounds around Tuggeranong, I am well aware that we have some really great ones and some that are definitely in need of some love.

So it is exciting to see that the planning and design works are currently underway for the eight playgrounds across Kambah, Wanniasa, Bonython, Isabella Plains, Gilmore and Conder. I wanted to take this chance to give a shout-out to Stacy Otero and her family and friends for their advocacy around the Bottrill Place playground. I had the pleasure last year of going out to that playground with Stacy and with a lot of her family and friends. David Smith, the member for Bean, came along and we looked at the

playground, went on the playground and realised that it was definitely in need of some love and so wrote to Minister Cheyne. It was in a suburb that had been listed in the plan for some playground work and it is getting some work done to it. It is in that design and planning phase at the moment. So that is really exciting.

Same thing for Archie, Beau and Beau's brother in Isabella Plains, who the Assembly might remember last year came in when I presented an out of order petition. Archie and Beau took a petition to their school and doorknocked their neighbours. Archie was only 10 at the time and advocated for a pump track in his playground on Yabtree Place in Isabella Plains. I am excited that it is another playground that is able to be upgraded because of this plan being implemented. So, I am really excited to see what that brings for Archie and his friends in the future.

I wanted to touch on Athllon Drive because the duplication of Athllon Drive is happening and I am so happy about it because it is not just about work for now, it is work for the future. Work so far has improved the active travel around the area and is working on better connecting the Wanniassa shops to the surrounding areas. It will make some parts of Athllon Drive safer to cross and access, but the duplication is also going to increase access to buses and public transport because there is going to be some new spots where you can get to the bus and new spots for crossings to easily and safely access the bus. This is great for the future of Tuggeranong and the future of the connection of Tuggeranong up into Woden and then on to Civic and beyond.

I brought a motion last year calling for a Tuggeranong transport-oriented design work, planning work, because this kind of thing requires change to how we think around how we design our roads, how we plan our housing and the duplication of Athllon Drive works with that. It is giving us better active travel, better access to public transport on a busy road and it is going to give us better roads. While people might say we do not need duplication now, it is only going to save us so many seconds, so many minutes driving along Athllon Drive—but that is now.

We need to think of the future. We need to think about that Tuggeranong is growing. We need that infrastructure there now. The duplication of Athllon Drive does that for us. A shout out to Tuggeranong for having the most tradies in Canberra, and with the current fuel crisis, I cannot go 10 minutes at home without hearing about the price of diesel. So I know we have a lot of utes, a lot of tradies in Brindabella who are using Athllon Drive, who are using the roads around Tuggeranong, and it is really important that, as we look at the future, we look at the holistic view of how our road network works for active travel, for drivers and for public transport users. On that, as a daily driver of the Monaro Highway, it is really great to see it progressing and that there will be works done by the end of the year.

I also wanted to take a moment to mention that as a Lanyon resident, it was great to hear a shoutout to Benchy McBenchface from Miss Nuttall. I frequently see people sitting on Benchy now when I am down at Lanyon shops and the other new seats around the area. People have taken to that. They use those seats. It has improved the vibe a bit. Hopefully one day we can get on with working with the owners of the shopping centre to make some changes around the whole site.

I wanted to do a shoutout about the dog park and getting it up and running. I am getting

so much good feedback around the new Lanyon dog park. There were some issues over the summer, being quite hot, with bindies and grass dying. I understand that is in a much better place now. I think keeping it closed for a bit longer last year than we had originally planned has given the grass and the plants that good foundation to keep it going. So I look forward to what it brings in the future.

I wanted to thank the local community for their advocacy in keeping the existing Point Hut dog park open. I will shout out to Mrs Morris for her work on this as well because it was a joint effort across members of Brindabella in keeping the dog park going. Meeting the dog owners down there and spending some time in the Point Hut dog park really showed how important it is to the community and how, as was always intended, the two parks would coexist next to each other.

There was never an intention for one to replace the other. There was always an idea that they would coexist. In community consultation, that was one of the things that came through, keeping those dog parks there to coexist. So it is really wonderful to see them both operating, working together. I see some people go to one, then go to the other, the bigger one, and then come back to the little one before they go home. Dogs seem to love them both. Owners love them both, and they have become really amazing social places, getting people out of the house, giving them something to do. There is such a connection down there with people who get to know each other and become friends because their dogs become friends.

So on that, I wanted to thank Minister Cheyne for bringing this statement today to give an update on how our plan for Tuggeranong is being implemented and I look forward to more updates in the future.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Regional plans—Weston Creek and Molonglo, and Woden Ministerial statement

MS CHEYNE (Ginninderra—Manager of Government Business, Attorney-General, Minister for Human Rights, Minister for City and Government Services and Minister for the Night-Time Economy) (10.30): I rise to update the Assembly on projects and commitments being delivered by this government across the Woden, Weston Creek and Molonglo Valley regions under my ministerial responsibilities in the City and Government Services portfolio. ACT Labor's regional plan—I am saying that with emphasis, Mr Speaker—for Weston Creek and Woden, focuses on transforming the district into a higher-density, mixed-use and transit-oriented hub.

Meanwhile, the Molonglo Valley Regional Plan contributes to the government's long-term framework designed to manage the rapid growth of the region, which is expected to house approximately 70,000 people by 2050. From shop upgrades and playgrounds to schools and health facilities, our regional plans outline our strategic investments in suburban infrastructure. The ACT government is focused on getting on with the job of delivering upgrades that matter most to Canberrans.

One element of the regional plans that comes up frequently at street stalls and out in the community are the local shop upgrades. Having completed upgrades at Coleman Court

and Duffy, we are committed to further upgrades at Cooleman Court and Mawson shops. These public space improvements at local shops aim to encourage the use and enjoyment of the wider precinct and experience, as well as encouraging the community to support local businesses and to shop local.

The Mawson shops in particular are a valued shopping precinct surrounded by residential areas. In July 2025 the public toilets at the Mawson shops were upgraded, including a new unisex accessible toilet. This is an upgrade that Mawson and wider Woden Valley residents asked for and it is one that we have prioritised and delivered. And for those that clean that toilet and toilet space, I believe that things are much improved.

Further upgrades to the public spaces, including improvements to pedestrian and public spaces at Mawson Place, are currently in the planning and design stages. A design consultant has been engaged to progress this work. I want to thank Minister Steel for his active engagement on the toilets and wider upgrades at Mawson shops in particular. The results of a community survey that the minister undertook have been incredibly useful in delivering Labor's regional plan.

Having completed the upgrades to Brierly Street and surrounding spaces in the last term, the government looks forward to building on that package of works and delivering the next stage of upgrades at Cooleman Court and Weston. I look forward to providing an update to the Assembly about that in due course.

Not only are we upgrading local shopping precincts, but we are also upgrading how you get to them. The government is undertaking the strategic investment in our roads and active travel network that were outlined in our regional plans. I am pleased to advise that the \$5 million fund to improve footpaths across Weston Creek and Woden has been established, and it includes both construction of new footpaths and the improvement of existing ones to make suburbs more accessible and better connected. Importantly, this will include work on the Streeton Drive cycleway.

Mr Speaker, if you follow me on Facebook—and I am not sure if you do, or maybe I have got you blocked—you will know that construction of the Molonglo River Bridge is progressing at pace. I will check. By late 2025, all precast deck units were installed and concrete pours for the next layer of the bridge deck commenced across the southbound carriageway. The remaining concrete pour is scheduled to be completed in the coming weeks, and the current advice is that no closure of Coppins Crossing will be required for this final pour. There are further works that will require the closure of Coppins Crossing Road, and they are planned up until mid-2026 to allow for parapet and railing installation. The project remains on track for the bridge to be opened before the end of 2026.

The Molonglo River Bridge has, unsurprisingly, captured the minds of many. It has proven to be an incredibly interesting opportunity to engage our community on how these kinds of projects progress. So many people went out to see the girder lifts occurring and I certainly had a lot of questions about when the next one would be happening. Not dissimilar to the interest in the balloon spectacular, getting up early to watch girder lifts really became something of a thing in winter 2025. I am glad that it has been a fantastic spectacle for the community, but I am most glad that this vital road

network project for the Molonglo Valley and greater region remains on track.

With population in the Molonglo Valley only expected to grow as we progress development of the town centre, work is being undertaken to explore options to improve public transport and traffic flow on Cotter Road from Streeton Drive to the Tuggeranong Parkway. It is also why the Molonglo Parkway Drive Connector will be an important new arterial road providing another connection to the Tuggeranong Parkway. This project will be delivered in stages and coordinated across ACT government agencies.

Stage 1 will run from John Gorton Drive near the Molonglo town centre and will be delivered by the Suburban Land Agency in collaboration with Infrastructure Canberra and the City and Environment Directorate. Stage 2, to be delivered by Infrastructure Canberra, will extend the road to Tuggeranong Parkway and include a new bridge over the Molonglo River and a grade-separated interchange. The capacity of Tuggeranong Parkway in this location will be assessed as part of the project. Infrastructure Canberra is currently progressing a refresh of the concept design, with AECOM appointed as the design consultant under a contract signed on 13 January. Detailed design and construction are planned for future years to align with surrounding development.

As we promised in the regional plan, we remain committed to the completion of the missing link in the path network at Coombs Peninsula, and work on this project is underway to make it easier for locals and visitors to explore and to enjoy the area. Noting that I have already provided an update to the Assembly on the duplication of Athllon Drive, I will refrain from repeating that information here, but I would note that this is an important road for those who live in Woden Valley too.

We have delivered upgrades to a number of key intersections along Streeton Drive with traffic lights to make the intersections safer as the region grows. For people in the Molonglo Valley and in Weston Creek this has been a major improvement. Waiting to turn right from, or left onto, Namatjira Drive has been made both significantly safer and easier. Coming or going from Woolworths, Aldi, or even your occasional McDonald's trip, has been made much more consistent. This was certainly a concern that has been raised with me by Minister Paterson on behalf of the community, and I am glad that this government has been able to deliver those upgrades.

Roads, paths and active travel links connect the community to more than just shopping centres. Playgrounds throughout the territory are an important aspect of the community that provide spaces for kids to explore, learn and connect. We have delivered upgrades at Lyons playground to provide an exciting play space with a unique theme for the community. We also listened to community feedback about the need for greater facilities at Ruth Park. This is why we delivered a new toilet block with two unisex accessible toilets and a baby change table at the Ruth Park playground in Coombs. I would note that the playground grass is going through some rehabilitation because some of the sod laid, regrettably, has not taken with the very dry weather over the summer period.

The ACT government has also taken significant steps in delivering a well-planned, sustainable and resilient Canberra, with important changes being approved to protect the unique and significant ecological values of key sites across Canberra, including

Coombs Peninsula and Blewitt's Block. This has included removing the future urban area overlays and protecting Blewitt's Block and the Coombs Peninsula as nature reserve and urban open space.

There are so many more improvements to come to Woden, Weston Creek and Molonglo regions from across all areas of government. I am proud to be part of a government that is getting on with the job of delivering for its community. I look forward to continuing to progress these matters with not only Ministers Steel and Paterson, but with all my colleagues who are delivering on our practical and targeted plans for the ACT.

I present the following paper:

Update on Weston Creek and Woden & Molonglo Regional Plans—Ministerial statement, 24 March 2026.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

DR PATERSON (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services, Minister for Women, Minister for the Prevention of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence, Minister for Corrections and Minister for Gaming Reform) (10.39): I rise this morning to thank Minister Cheyne for all the work to date on delivering for the residents of Woden, Weston Creek and Molonglo regional plans. As always, it is a great honour to represent the constituents of Murrumbidgee in the Assembly.

Just yesterday, I visited the site of the new Woden interchange with Minister Steel. This is an incredible new facility that is worlds away from the concrete, unsafe wind tunnel of the previous bus interchange.

The best thing about this new interchange is that it is a tangible marker of the government's commitment of light rail coming to Woden. This interchange is future-proof for the next stage of light rail. I will always be a strong advocate for light rail, and I look forward to the benefits it will bring to the south side community. I would like to thank Minister Steel for progressing this work to this stage, and I look forward to the interchange opening in the coming weeks.

I have also visited the new CIT Woden facility with Minister Pettersson. This represents another key project in the Woden town centre that ACT Labor promised and delivered. CIT Woden is an incredible facility, which will allow students to learn vital skills for the future, to contribute to our community.

Labor is also delivering community amenities outside of the regional plans. Earlier this year, Minister Berry announced that, as part of the territory's aquatic strategy, ACT Labor will build a new 50 metre pool in Woden.

Minister Berry is also delivering on her promise to provide modern and sustainable learning spaces for the children at Garran Primary School. I was proud to visit the school last year to see the opening of the first stage of the expansion and modernisation of this school. The next stage of the Garran Primary modernisation project is underway

and will deliver great new facilities for both the broader community and the school community. I look forward to working with Minister Berry to see this project completed.

I also look forward to the work that is proposed on upgrades to the Mawson shops. This will be fantastic for local residents.

We have also seen the transformation of the Phillip district enclosed oval—with staged upgrades having started—bringing enhanced sporting facilities to the Woden Valley. I look forward to watching our local sporting clubs, including the Royals Rugby Union Club and the Woden Valley Rams enjoy this new facility.

Last year, I ran a petition relating to improving the liveability of Woden town centre. The call from the community from this petition was for an inquiry into improving the sustainability and liveability of Phillip and Woden town centre and its surrounding precincts. I note that the committee is still conducting this inquiry, and I look forward to their findings as well as the formal government response.

Weston Creek is my home and where I chose to raise my family. From the upgrades at Cooleman Court that Minister Cheyne described, to upgrades from the last term of government at the Duffy shops and Waramanga playgrounds, it is fantastic to see these investments. Cooleman Court is a regular place for my street stalls, my shopping and meeting with constituents. I receive regular feedback on the upgrades that were made to Brierly Street and constituents are looking forward to the next stage of this important project.

In my time in the Assembly, I have run many petitions on feedback from the electorate. A key one that the government has delivered on is the public toilet facility at Ruth Park playground in Coombs, which Minister Cheyne mentioned. I ran this petition in March 2024, and the call was simple: to provide toilet facilities at the playground. Minister Cheyne responded to this petition and confirmed the government would allocate funding to build this toilet facility in the 24-25 budget. I am really pleased to see that these toilet facilities are now in action at Ruth Park.

I am also working with Lyons residents, who have called on a petition—which is currently open—to commit to the design, funding and installation of accessible public toilets at the Lyons shops, to ensure the dignity, safety and comfort of all community members at the Lyons shops precinct. I will continue to speak to my constituents about this matter, and look forward to working with Minister Cheyne on this issue.

The Molonglo Valley is one of the fastest growing areas of our city and is home to many young families setting up their lives in Canberra. As Minister Cheyne mentioned, it is anticipated that the population of Molonglo Valley will be approximately 70,000 by 2050. I continue to work with colleagues to see the future of the town centre continue to progress. I will continue to work with local residents to ensure their voices are heard, on what they would like to see in their town centre.

Like many in our community, I have really enjoyed seeing Minister Cheyne's updates on social media about the progress on the Molonglo River bridge. The Molonglo River bridge is an outstanding infrastructure build that will be a 200-metre-long bridge across

the river, as well as 1.7 kilometres of new arterial road leading to the bridge, and two new intersections.

The construction of the new Molonglo River bridge and completion of John Gorton Drive will transform the Molonglo region and better connect the suburbs of Molonglo, including Denman Prospect and Whitlam, to the rest of the Canberra. I am strongly supportive of the continued works and developments of new arterial roads to facilitate traffic and public transport movement in and out of the Molonglo Valley. This includes investment in active travel, and the missing link on the Coombs Peninsula.

The ACT government is also delivering additional emergency service infrastructure for the Molonglo Valley. In August last year, I provided an update to the community that work on the Molonglo ESA station remains on track and looks set to be completed later this year. The Molonglo emergency services station is set to be the largest in the ACT and will provide vital access to emergency services for those living and visiting the Molonglo, Woden Valley and Weston Creek districts.

I will also look forward to continuing work to progress a Molonglo police station.

Mr Speaker, this is just a snapshot of projects that the ACT government is working on—inside and outside of the regional plans—to deliver for the residents of Woden, Weston Creek and Molonglo.

To the residents of Murrumbidgee: I am proud to represent our community every day, and I will continue to advocate for you and for the local issues that are important to you.

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage and Minister for Transport) (10.45): I thank Minister Cheyne for her update to the Assembly on the projects and commitments being delivered by our Labor government across my electorate of Murrumbidgee. ACT Labor's regional plan for Weston Creek and Woden sets a clear direction for creating a more vibrant, walkable place to live that supports quality of life—with more homes, services and transport all working together.

In Molonglo, our regional plan is shaping one of Canberra's fastest-growing areas, preparing for a community of around 70,000 people by 2050. Whether it is upgrading local shops and existing suburbs, building new playgrounds, investing in schools and health facilities, our regional plans show how we are strengthening our suburbs. The ACT government is committed to delivering the practical improvements that make daily life better for Canberrans.

A major part of our plan and commitment was delivering upgrades to Mawson group centre. This centre has grown into a lively precinct which draws people from across Canberra to its diverse range of shops, cafes and restaurants. I know my community is really proud of their local shops at Mawson. They are very keen also to point out that Mawson shops was originally the name for the Swinger Hill shops, and to not get it confused with what they know as Mawson Southlands.

Recent feedback from a survey I sent to the community shows strong support for improvements that would make the area better for pedestrians—with new pedestrian

crossings, outdoor seating, greenery and upgraded paving—as well as improvements to the southern car park. I have passed that feedback onto Minister Cheyne and the City and Environment Directorate to consider as part of the design work, which I am really excited to hear is getting underway.

Many residents also highlighted the need to upgrade the public toilets and undertake further upgrades at the centre. I am really pleased that those public toilets have been upgraded within the centre, and that work is underway across the rest of Mawson. That also includes planning work that I know the Suburban Land Agency is undertaking to release land for a second supermarket at the centre. I am looking forward to further consultation with the community about that.

We have heard clearly from the community how important the Coombs Peninsula and Bluetts Block are. These are areas that have both environmental and amenity value to our community, and that is why ACT Labor committed to protect these areas. Taking action on these was one of the first things that I did as planning minister after the 2024 election.

I am really pleased that, as planning minister, I have now approved a major plan amendment—No 5—to remove future urban overlay from these areas, safeguarding the Coombs Peninsula and Bluetts Block from future development. We also brought Coombs Peninsula into the Molonglo River reserve as an NUZ4 river corridor zone, as well as public-zoned open space.

I am pleased to hear the progress that Minister Cheyne has reported on to the Assembly on the new shared path and completing the missing path link at Coombs Peninsula. This builds on our strong record of environmental protection and supports our vision for a thriving, sustainable Molonglo Valley.

As Molonglo continues to grow, we are planning ahead to keep people moving. Work is underway to improve traffic flow along Cotter Road, building on the duplication our government undertook on the Cotter Road some years ago. It is important that we continue to look at improvements to connectivity and traffic flow in the Molonglo area. I am pleased that Labor has delivered on our election commitment to undertake a traffic study on the Cotter Road, which has provided the government advice on what steps we can take to support the movement of both private passenger vehicles and public transport along that key corridor—especially given the highly popular R7 and R10 bus routes.

The government is considering the outcomes of the study and exploring what works can be done to address traffic flow while work is, of course, underway in parallel on the Molonglo River bridge project—which we are looking forward to being completed by the end of the year—and as we prepare for the new Molonglo parkway connector; that new east-west arterial road which will connect with the future Molonglo town centre. I am really pleased to hear the minister's update on progress on this new connection to the town centre. I know also that the Suburban Land Agency is continuing to progress the design of the Molonglo town centre, ahead of going out to the community for consultation. And, of course, as part of that, they are making sure that they are delivering in the design on Labor's election commitments around that commercial hub and the community facilities within it.

Yesterday, I was very pleased to join my fellow member for Murrumbidgee and minister Marisa Paterson to announce the opening of the Woden interchange on 20 April. Work is substantially complete there and we have achieved a huge milestone in transforming Woden. It is a big win for the community. This is a modern, light-rail-ready transport hub that will move over 10,000 people per day and give Woden the safe, accessible and future-focused transport interchange that it deserves.

Having spent quite a bit of time at Woden interchange over the years, particularly as a youngster, I know that it was an interchange that was not just over 50 years old but was hidden away and dark, and the community was telling us clearly that they felt unsafe. The new interchange is a huge contrast. It is light-filled, has great lighting and modern shelters. It has brought tree canopy cover into the town centre in an area that had a fair bit of concrete and asphalt. We are really pleased with the outcome, and I am looking forward to hearing the community's feedback as the new interchange opens in April.

I encourage the community to look up the changed platform arrangements. They are now available on the Transport Canberra website. But there is no significant change to bus timings with the opening in April of the new interchange.

We have fixed a lot of the issues that the community has raised through that but, importantly, it is part of a broader precinct renewal in Woden, associated with the new CIT campus. We chose deliberately to build the new CIT campus on the old interchange and to build a new interchange to deliver on the vision of the Woden town centre master plan of an on-street interchange on Callum Street, ready for light rail—and also take up that opportunity in the master plan of creating a pedestrianised east-west pedestrian boulevard connecting through the CIT campus to the interchange and bringing new public spaces, with improved canopy cover and parkland to the town centre. There has been a fantastic result there. The trees and landscaping have really been settling in, particularly with recent rain. It is great to see that area coming to life.

Of course, that project is just one part of the biggest investment that Woden has seen in the last 50 years: the new CIT campus, the new electric bus depot—the largest fit-for-purpose electric bus depot in the country—and now the interchange being completed. We are getting on with the next priorities that our government has in that area: a new community centre and a new 50-metre outdoor pool which will be owned by the government, and, of course, the progress that we are making on light rail stage 2B as well.

We said we would deliver for Woden, and we are getting it done, and we will keep delivering the infrastructure that matters for our growing city. Mr Speaker, this is very exciting for the residents of my electorate, for Murrumbidgee, and I look forward to consulting them on further work that the government is undertaking—particularly in my own portfolios. I am sure my constituents are also excited to see how our communities will be supported as we keep delivering on the commitments that we made at the 2024 election.

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (10.55): I thank the minister for bringing this statement today; although, after reading it and listening to the minister, I think she might have misnamed it. Probably the title of this should have been, “Ministerial statement on

things the Canberra Liberals made the government do and fixing things Labor kind of messed up in the first place.” As you read through this document, it is a litany of failures, delayed projects and things that should have been done long ago. And I might just work through it, and please forgive me if, in doing so, I plagiarise myself, or you, Mr Speaker, given the number of times that we, as the Canberra Liberals, have raised many of these issues over and over again in this place.

One of the first things that jumped out at me as I was looking at this was the upgrades to Mawson. Mawson shops and Cooleman Court, of course, are places that the Canberra Liberals have been advocating for for a long time. Indeed, it was quite stark, I think, that the government only came to the position that they needed to do something in Mawson after we launched the community campaign for a new vision for Mawson. And in case anyone has forgotten, that came on the back of a decade of neglect of Mawson. Indeed, the government had previously promised, all the way back in 2015, that they were going to turn Mawson into the Lonsdale Street of the south, and yet here we are 11 years later, and we are hearing that only now—only just now—has the government engaged someone to, maybe, design something for these upgrades that are supposedly going to be transformative.

Meanwhile, if you look around the area in Mawson, you will see the utter decay and degradation of the spaces that the government is responsible for maintaining. You go over to Cooleman Court and you will find that, yes, there have been some improvements to Brierly Street, but, essentially, what we saw happen was that there was a do-over of things that had gone a little bit wrong the last time they attempted to do them. The initial result of some of the improvements that they had made was that some local businesses started getting flooded because the water was being directed straight into their front door.

Mr Speaker, having trumpeted their successes in these areas, the minister goes on to talk their \$5 million fund to improve footpaths across Weston Creek and Woden. Now, of course, this is largely related to the government’s insourcing agenda, an ideological insourcing agenda. And it comes on the back of many, many years of Canberra Liberals’ advocacy to improve those footpath connections.

The state of footpaths across the electorate and across the ACT is absolutely abominable. That presents risks to our older Canberrans. It presents risks to our younger Canberrans. It makes it incredibly difficult for anyone with a disability, anyone who has children in a stroller, to actually make their way around our community. You have to pay attention to getting the basics right, and it has taken far too long for this government to get around to paying any attention to that. There are still places right across our electorate where the size of the cracks in footpaths is a daily reminder for the community that the government has failed them year after year after year.

I could not let today go without reflecting on the development of the town centre. Famously, this is a town centre that the government spent years telling us that we did not need. The development of a town centre of Woden was not even on the government’s agenda. A commercial centre would be enough; local shops and a small Mawson-style centre was going to be enough for the entire Molonglo Valley as far as this government were concerned until the Canberra Liberals launched a community campaign along with community leaders to get a town centre.

I am glad that the government has come along on this, but it should not have taken political pressure like this to realise that, if you have got a community of 70,000 people, they deserve access to exactly the same level of infrastructure and level of support as any other community in Canberra. But I am glad they have come along on it. By the same token, I am very glad that, when it came to the Molonglo Valley, they paid attention to our campaign to get Molonglo moving again.

Indeed, after the commitments that the Canberra Liberals came out with and our focus on traffic, suddenly the local members from Labor realised that, yes, traffic is a problem in Molonglo Valley, and it is an increasing problem. The problems that stem from traffic flow, or lack of traffic flow, throughout Molonglo Valley are expanding further and further into those suburbs.

So it is about time they started paying attention to things. And I am not convinced, no matter what the minister or the two local members say, that they have managed to fix the problem by making some changes to timing of traffic lights on one intersection. The problems of traffic in Molonglo Valley are getting worse. They have not gotten better. The commitment to the so-called Parkway Drive Connector—the east-west arterial that was promised long ago and has been a subject of discussion right from the initial planning of the Molonglo Valley. The idea that that is going to be Canberra's biggest cul-de-sac for years and years before the government ever gets around to connecting it and turning it into a true arterial road—that decision means that people in Molonglo Valley are going to be facing this congestion for years to come, and it is going to keep on getting worse.

That brings me, of course, very importantly to the bridge. I am glad to see that that is progressing. It should have been built by now. Indeed, the government promised that by now it would have been built. In 2019, the government was talking about getting started on this bridge. It was not until I entered this place in December of 2022, so shortly after I was elected to this place and started putting pressure on the government—actually, no, I was putting pressure on the government about this before December. In December 2022, I think the pivotal moment came because that is when I asked Santa Claus if he could please get this bridge delivered for the people of Molonglo Valley. Santa has come through. Where we saw from Labor years and years of delay, Santa came through! They finally realised that people in Molonglo were not going to accept being neglected any longer, and the government is finally getting around to it, even if they are at this point years after when they said that the bridge would be built and delivered.

What else has the government mentioned? The Coombs Peninsula! That would be the place that the government wanted to pave until the Canberra Liberals and the Greens came out and said that it was an important community resource that people need to be able to access.

Let's have a look at Athllon Drive and a proposal that the Canberra Liberals brought way back in 2012. Finally, the government is getting around to it, after many, many, years of having a sign on Athllon Drive saying that they would do it. Although, it looks like the planning of that may still not actually factor-in their plan for a tram.

Let's have a look at the proposal around Ruth Park playground. I will admit that one of the Labor local members advocated for bringing a toilet block to this playground. But it is absolutely astounding to me that the government did not do it in the first place. How could you build a more than \$7 million playground—a destination playground, effectively, for people across the Molonglo Valley, across Woden, across Weston Creek and people going there from all over the place—but not even put a toilet there? They have not provided sufficient parking, and that is presenting traffic problems and a risk for all of the children who need to cross the road. This is just an absolute litany of failures from the government.

I am glad that we, on this side of the chamber, have achieved so much by forcing the government to start to make a difference in Woden, Weston Creek, Molonglo Valley, and in other places right across the ACT. The Canberra Liberals have been leading on pushing the government for delivery of services—the type of basic things that Canberrans expect; the type of basic things Canberrans should be able to expect.

Canberrans deserve a government that actually takes leadership and that is not perpetually following: a government that does not require a committee inquiry to tell them how to make a town centre more liveable. It should not need a committee to tell the government what to think. It should not need a committee to tell the government what to do. The government's job is to lead, and they have been falling down in that too.

So many years on from so many promises and so many delays, it is astounding that Labor is still trying to spin a litany and history of failure into some sort of success. The Canberra Liberals will continue to fill the leadership void. The Canberra Liberals will continue to bring practical, sensible improvements that Canberrans deserve so that we can have the type of city and the type of communities that people want.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (11.06): I would like to begin by acknowledging the investment the government has made in Woden, Weston Creek and Molonglo, including the Mawson toilet upgrade. The toilets had been described by constituents as a health hazard. Thank you for the new Lyons playground, the Duffy playground upgrade and the new Molonglo Valley bridge, which is expected to open before the end of the year, and we are looking forward to that. I note that our paths are old, and that while the \$5 million is welcome, it will not go far, because there is a lot of work to be done on them.

However, as highlighted earlier in the statement, particularly in the second paragraph, the underlying focus of this regional plan is very clear. It is about transforming these districts into higher density, mixed-use, transit-oriented areas and about managing rapid population growth, with Molonglo Valley alone expected to house around 70,000 people by 2050. Density is happening, but it is not the only issue.

What should election commitments for this regional plan include? The issue is that densification is being pursued without the associated precinct planning and social infrastructure ambition required to ensure people can live locally, socialise locally and genuinely connect with their community.

What we are seeing in Molonglo is the delivery of roads, bridges, paths, all of which

are important. But we are not seeing the same level of commitment to the social infrastructure that turns a fast-growing district into a liveable connected place. There are different needs across the districts, including dog parks, better playgrounds, upgraded shops and larger social infrastructure, like recreational and cultural facilities so that likeminded have places to meet locally.

We also need our environment to be looked after. Throughout this densification, our tree canopy needs to be maintained. Yarralumla Creek needs appropriate naturalisation to allow biodiversity to thrive, and it needs to be able to do what creeks do—they flood. So this needs to be the priority, rather than yield being the outcome the government is after. Southlands needs greater ambition than crossings and footpaths. It needs a community centre for the residents of Woden south.

While I thank the government for its investments and acknowledge the work delivered, I also call for a stronger commitment to precinct-level planning that includes social infrastructure. This is preventative health which is good for our physical and mental health. Successful densification is not just about a bunch of upgrades: it is about where people live; and it is about how they connect, where they gather and whether they feel they truly belong in the communities we are building.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Environment—urban expansion

Ministerial statement

MS ORR (Yerrabi—Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water, Minister for Disability, Carers and Community Services and Minister for Seniors and Veterans) (11.09): I rise to make a statement on the ongoing work of the ACT government to protect key environmental values while still supporting sustainable development in our growing city.

The matters outlined in this statement also go to the government's consideration of the self-initiated investigation by the former Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment, referred to as the *Close to the edge* report and associated recommendations. The report was tabled in the Assembly in May 2025, and while the government is not required to make a formal response to the commissioner's self-initiated investigation, the government has considered the matters raised by the report and provided a response, which I will table along with the ministerial statement.

In March 2025, the Australian Bureau of Statistics estimated the ACT's population to be approximately 484,000 people. Due to the steadily increasing population, there is a need to plan the ACT of the future to ensure a finely balanced approach to protecting the environment whilst delivering housing and infrastructure for a growing community. In the 2025-26 ACT budget and in accordance with the National Housing Accord, the government committed to 30,000 new homes by 2030. To achieve this target, the government has already repositioned the ACT public service to ensure stronger, integrated decision-making in relation to the future planning of Canberra.

The government recognises that there is only a limited amount of land left for new

suburban development and ongoing expansion is simply not possible, and instead we must make better use of the existing urban footprint and plan for a more compact, efficient and sustainable Canberra. Against this background, the government is progressing a landscape plan which represents a key environmental commitment for this term. The Landscape Plan will adopt a cross-government, deconflicted, spatialised vision for land use, including strategic prioritised conservation land management.

As I have previously announced, the government is undertaking community consultation on the new draft Nature Conservation Strategy. The new strategy takes a strategic and landscape-based approach to ensure nature is conserved in the ACT. It presents a significant shift in how we approach conservation, moving from seeking to maintain areas of environmental significance to taking a nature-positive approach which will see us improve nature in our city.

Feedback to date has been positive, with the ACT community very much valuing the shift and the actions outlined to achieve this. I would like to recognise and thank all the environmental groups and enthusiastic community members who have been involved in the consultations to date. The new strategy will be followed by a proposal to be considered by cabinet to reform the current Nature Conservation Act.

All Canberrans can celebrate that almost 70 per cent of the ACT's landmass is already protected under law as a national park or reserve. This is the highest of any state or territory. However, nature does not only happen in our reserves. Nature abounds throughout our city, and the off-reserve areas of environmental significance are one aspect of nature protection and conservation where we can do better.

In response to the above, a key action of the draft Nature Conservation Strategy is to identify, map and strengthen legislative provisions to ensure tenure-blind protection of matters of environmental significance and off-reserve priority conservation areas. This one sentence, while relatively short, is huge in its remit and a giant progression for our nature conservation in our city. It is also one that requires a lot of action to achieve.

The Landscape Plan will be the mechanism used by the ACT government to identify and map matters of environmental significance. The ACT government has been doing initial scoping work for the Landscape Plan and has determined that the Landscape Plan will build on the work of environment and planning teams to ensure that our natural and urban environments thrive, and Canberra remains the Bush capital and a city in a landscape.

In addition, the Landscape Plan will take a long-term, strategic, spatial approach to urban growth, climate adaptation and conservation planning; integrate and resolve urban growth and nature conservation objectives across the landscape by building on the work of the district strategies; identify future areas suitable for conservation and urban development across the territory, including defining the urban growth boundary; identify a connected and climate-ready network of priority conservation areas; provide strategic and spatial direction for continuing work to adapt the urban areas with urban heat mitigation; support sound, long-term land use planning, providing increased certainty and better outcomes; and support a more resilient and liveable city in the landscape.

Priority conservation areas will include critical habitat for threatened species and communities, climate refugia, key connectivity corridors and priority areas for restoration. These areas will include current reserves, as well as off-reserve areas of high value that could be targeted for stewardship programs, community conservation, future reserves, restoration, key areas that support high-value areas and future offset supply.

While we are currently in the process of hiring the ACT Government Landscape Architect, who will be responsible for delivering the Landscape Plan, we have not been resting on our laurels. The government has continued its work over the past year to identify, assess and map key environmental values, and this includes threatened species and ecological habitat mapping, social values mapping, constraints mapping and land-use conflict mapping.

This brings me to an important intersection of two key priorities being considered by the ACT government: the first being better protecting matters of environmental significance, and the second being the consideration of an urban growth boundary. The government is building on the previous reforms to ACT's planning laws and frameworks to find balanced ways to ensure that environmental values are a key factor in decision-making in development. Consistent with supply and confidence agreements and the Assembly resolution of 10 April 2025, the government will set an urban growth boundary this term. All of the work I have just outlined will together guide and inform the government on whether development poses the lowest risk to the environment against those areas that would benefit from being protected.

Today, I can confirm that the ACT government has determined that the foundation of the urban growth boundary will be the landscape network as outlined in the Landscape Plan. I will continue to work with my colleague Minister Steel, the minister for planning, to progress and realise this commitment.

The *Close to the edge* report focuses on habitat loss resulting from development, and sadly, habitat loss is just one risk faced by our natural ecosystems. Other risks include the impacts of climate change, more frequent and intense natural disasters, and invasive plants and animals. The government is focused on the threats posed by all these challenges and continues to progress reforms to address them. The next Climate Change Strategy will build on existing measures to improve the resilience of threatened species and ecosystems and identify species at risk of harm from climate change.

The government is continuing to develop a whole-of-government approach for implementing the National Biosecurity Strategy 2022-2032 to prevent and respond quickly to biosecurity incursions. The government is also pleased to see that the commonwealth has passed a package of laws to amend the EPBC Act. These laws have been a long time in coming. The reforms will see an independent National Environment Protection Agency be established in addition to National Environment Standards to set the boundaries for decision-makers under the EPBC Act.

The government is looking forward to identifying further opportunities from these new laws to enhance our nature conservation efforts. We will be scoping the possibilities of bioregional plans as set out in the new laws, and these plans allow for a broad-scale assessment to be undertaken to establish development and conservation zones, which

aligns with the government's Landscape Plan commitment, providing further opportunity to align and better balance environmental conservation and protection and development.

In closing, the government will continue its efforts to protect key environmental values as Canberra grows, and I look forward to providing the Assembly with further updates as we work to progress this.

I present the following papers:

Conserving Nature in a Growing City and Government Response to Special Report by the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment *Close to the Edge*, an Investigation into the effects of urban expansion on the environment of the ACT (2025)—Ministerial statement, 24 March 2026.

Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment Act—Special report by the commissioner for sustainability and the Environment—*Close to the edge*—An investigation into the effects of urban expansion on the Environment of the ACT—Government response, dated March 2026.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the ministerial statement.

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (11.18): I welcome the minister's statement and this response to former commissioner Sophie Lewis's *Close to the edge* report. I know there was a bit of uncertainty about whether we would get a government response to the report, so it is good to see a response. I believe that, because it is a non-statutory, self-referred inquiry, the response from the government just notes the recommendations; it does not say whether or not they are agreed to. That is slightly less useful for our environmental community than a more targeted response that says, "Yes, we agree with these findings. Yes, we agree with these recommendations, and we will follow through." But we have heard some really positive updates this morning.

Dr Sophie Lewis released the damning *Close to the edge* report 10 months ago. That report sounded the alarm for nature. It said that our very reputation as the bush capital was at stake in our approach to urban development. She said:

In order to comprehensively address the decline of nature, Canberra's environment needs primacy and funding.

She also said:

... government spending on the environment at all jurisdictional levels is meagre and demonstrably inadequate.

This morning, the minister said:

The government is building on the previous reforms to ACT's planning laws and frameworks to find balanced ways to ensure that environmental values are a key factor in decision-making in development.

It is great that we are considering the environment in these key decisions, but that is not quite what the report said. That is not what is required at this juncture. We do not need balance; we need the environment to be prioritised. That is what the commissioner said. We need primacy of the environmental values that our community holds so highly, and we need funding.

I am pleased to welcome some of the more tangible steps of progress. We have a timeline now for the government landscape architect appointment process. The Greens suggested that we have a government landscape architect. That idea has certainly evolved. The minister has taken that on and taken that forward in quite dramatic ways. It seems that this government landscape architect will now play a key role in going through the process, running the consultation and setting where the urban growth boundary will be. They will play a key role in working out which areas of nature will be resourced and protected within Canberra's footprint, for both recreational and environmental use, for habitat use, and for wildlife corridors for all of our critters.

The mapping work has already substantially been done by EPSDD, and I have heard really positive things from the environmental community about that mapping work. But this government landscape architect has a lot of work to do. I think the recruitment process started in January. It sounds like it might take six months to hire someone. I guess it is a difficult position to fill. We are a little bit nervous about how much work this one position within the public sector has to deliver on. We need to make sure that they have the resources they need to do that, and that they can start their work soon enough.

I remind the Assembly that it is fantastic that we have the reconfirmed commitment to setting that urban growth boundary. In the April 2025 motion, it was agreed by this Assembly that the amendment to the Territory Plan would establish that urban growth boundary and that the draft would be released by June 2027. We set that June 2027 date because that is probably about as late as you can go, when it comes to making make sure that Canberra does set its urban growth boundary in this term of government, making sure that all the environmental work has been done and, really importantly, that the community consultation work has been done on exactly where that urban growth boundary is. We are hoping that the current work is delivering on that timeline.

We are pleased to have a date for the review of the Nature Conservation Act. It sounds like that will be this year. Again, there is a lot of work going into that, and we need to make sure that it is high-quality work, that there is good consultation, and that it is protecting Canberra's environment in the way that it needs to.

We need to make sure that the environment is really prioritised in this year's budget. We have heard alarm bell after alarm bell from our commissioners for the environment, our former commissioner for the environment, former ministers for the environment and our environmental community. It is great to hear the minister acknowledge all the problems that our environment is facing. Climate change is accelerating those problems. That is why it is really important that we do make space for this. There is a national campaign for us to dedicate one per cent of government budgets to protecting nature. That is not to all sustainable development and climate change action; that is just to nature protection—the weeding, the biodiversity network and the rangers that we need out on the ground to help look after that.

With respect to the grants that we set aside to fund our volunteer landcarers, we have an enormous workforce. It is worth at least \$21 million, the last time it was looked at, for volunteers caring for our land here in the ACT. But that requires grants, support and well-resourced environmental organisations who can help to manage and organise those volunteers and make sure they have what they need to do their work. It is essential that we resource this work, if we want it to be done. If we say we value this, we need to make sure that we are also funding nature. That is the only way it will work.

We do have a lot of people in Canberra who care about this quite a lot. The Conservation Council will be holding their “Save Our Western Edge!” rally at 1.30 pm today, out in Civic Square. I am sure everybody here has seen information about that rally and has received an invite. Stop by and see the people in action calling for what they want, speaking up for those who cannot speak—for the wildlife and for nature, which has no voice.

All of this progress towards protecting the western edge, setting that urban growth boundary and protecting our mapped network within our footprint is good to hear, but we need to make sure that it is properly resourced, that it is delivered within this term and that the steps are taken to make sure that it is consulted on properly.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (11.24): I also rise to speak in response to Minister Orr’s statement this morning. The *Close to the edge* report was described, in a release by the Conservation Council ACT region, as a “moral reckoning”. It found that the reputation of Canberra as Australia’s bush capital is under serious threat. It warned that, with current policy and legislative mechanisms; the Canberra we are building for future generations would remain characterised by increasing encroachment of development on key parts of our bush capital and continuous loss of the territory’s biodiversity. The report found that the ACT’s building footprint had grown by 40 per cent from 2004 to 2023, and further small losses to grasslands and woodlands along the way had resulted in death by a thousand cuts to our environment.

Such a serious report requires a serious, considered response by government. I will say that the government’s response does go some way to addressing some of the concerns raised in this report. I want to take this opportunity to welcome the draft Nature Conservation Strategy, which I see as a good start to tackling some of the issues that have been outlined. I would also like to take the opportunity to thank the minister, her staff and relevant public servants for their time and hard work on this, as well as their efforts and time in providing me and my staff with a briefing.

As I flagged during that briefing, though, the Nature Conservation Strategy and, by implication, elements of the recommendations made in the *Close to the edge* report, need to be given the best opportunity to produce nature-positive outcomes. That necessarily includes adequate funding, as Ms Clay touched on. Recommendation 13 of the *Close to the edge* report was to “increase the level of funding support to facilitate the implementation and maintenance of high-quality living infrastructure”. The government’s response only notes this recommendation and provides no meaningful response. Of course, it notes all the recommendations. Yet, as the report states:

In the 2023–24 and 2024–25 ACT budgets, only three per cent of total spending

was allocated to the environment, sustainable development and climate change combined.

It goes on to say:

... the proportion of this funding that goes to biodiversity conservation is only a fraction of one per cent of the total ACT budget. It is therefore hard to take the view that biodiversity protection is a genuine priority for the ACT.

That was the conclusion made in this report. As I have said, the Nature Conservation Strategy is a good start, but that good start risks meaninglessness if we do not actually fund it. I hope to see this reflected in the upcoming budget.

I also want to highlight a second concern, which is how the government's response to this report has been managed. The report was released in May last year. It has taken the government almost a year to respond. While I understand that the government may not be required to respond to the report, it should have done so, and done so in a timely and substantive way.

The response that we have in front of us this morning does not systematically go through each recommendation, as is standard for most government responses of this nature. Instead, it lists work that the government is doing in this space, and it reads a bit more like a ministerial statement rather than a meaningful government response to a significant, and significantly important, report on the future of the territory.

This calls into question the effectiveness of the current requirements for the government to respond, or not, to self-initiated investigations by the commissioner. These kinds of investigations often come from concerns raised by members of our community—concerns that ought to be—and are, by the commissioner—taken seriously. They are informed by the tireless efforts of volunteers, passionate community members, rangers and ecological experts who have seen firsthand the outcome of poor policies, or perhaps poor implementation of policies, for nature. These investigations are funded using public resources. They are equally important as any other kind of investigation. They deserve an equally substantive response from the government.

I hope to see the government look at how it might better hold itself accountable in this respect, by making it a requirement actually to respond in substance to all recommendations, and to do so in a timely manner, to self-initiated investigations from the commissioner.

With all of that said, I look forward to progress on the Nature Conservation Strategy, the incorporation of feedback, which I understand will have been extensive, from different stakeholders on that strategy, and its implementation delivering nature-positive outcomes for the territory moving forward.

MS ORR (Yerrabi—Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water, Minister for Disability, Carers and Community Services and Minister for Seniors and Veterans) (11.29), in reply: In response to some of Mr Emerson's points, particularly around a substantive response from the government, I would draw the attention of Mr Emerson and all members to the response and the commentary within it, stating how land use change is

one aspect, and one that has been investigated throughout the commissioner's investigation. But there are a lot of contributing factors, and the government certainly has not sought to provide a response that does not adequately address the concerns raised; rather, it is about contextualising those within the broader considerations that are there for conserving our environment. That is quite clearly stepped out within our response. Again, I would draw members' attention to that when they are looking at how that response has been framed.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Fiscal Sustainability of the ACT—Select Committee Interim report

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (11.30): I present the following report:

Fiscal Sustainability of the ACT—Select Committee—Report 1—Interim Report—Inquiry into the Fiscal Sustainability of the ACT, dated 20 March 2026, together with the relevant minutes of proceedings.

I move:

That the report be noted.

This interim report is the first report of the Select Committee on the Fiscal Sustainability of the ACT for the Eleventh Assembly. The Assembly established the committee on 4 December 2025. At the time of report consideration, the committee had received 20 submissions and held two public hearings. Witnesses took nine questions on notice.

A feature of this inquiry is that the Assembly requested that funds be made available for external expertise to assist the committee. The Office of the Legislative Assembly conducted a procurement process and selected Mr Saul Eslake in this capacity. Mr Eslake has prepared a very helpful interim report of his own. We look forward to receiving his final report in April.

The committee made four findings in its interim report. We found that the government is spending more than it is raising in revenue and that this is due largely to decisions to both fund services and pursue major infrastructure projects without an equivalent increase in revenue or taxation.

We also found that the net operating balance entered deficit in 2012-13 and has remained in deficit to the current year. Related to this, the committee found that borrowings and associated interest payments commenced increasing in 2012-13, when the ACT's interest became a net expense, and since 2022-23 the trajectory of borrowings and associated interest payments has sharply increased. As a result, the committee found there are reasonable concerns that this trajectory will affect the provision and mix of services that Canberra needs in future.

The committee made three recommendations. We recommended that the ACT government respond in detail and directly to the terms of reference 4(b) to 4(h) addressing Mr Eslake's interim report dated 27 February 2026, and the S&P Global

Ratings report of September 2025, via an additional submission provided by 29 May 2026.

The committee also recommended that the ACT government adopt the cash surplus/deficit, as outlined in the statement of cash flows, as a key measure of fiscal sustainability and that it be given equal prominence to the government's measures of net operating balance. Finally, the committee recommended that the ACT government develop a more specific fiscal strategy in its budget documents, which sets clear numerical targets and the years by which targets will be met.

We thank the people who took time to write submissions and appear at hearings, and we thank them for their significant contribution to this inquiry. The committee looks forward to engaging further with stakeholders and testing some of the other claims and evidence received.

I thank the other members of the committee—the Deputy Chair, Mr Cocks, Ms Carrick and Ms Tough. I also give special thanks to our secretariat—David, James, Jennifer, Lydia and Mae—who worked extremely hard to very tight deadlines on this report.

I commend the report to the Assembly.

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (11.34): I want to speak briefly on this, because it is an incredibly important report. It is an interim report and, in many ways, its findings are interim as well. However, the process so far has absolutely starkly highlighted the fiscal position in which the ACT finds itself.

The trajectory that the committee saw, through Mr Eslake's report and through the data that we have looked at, is absolutely stark. The turnaround that we have seen since the 2011-12 period until now shows a very clear degradation in the ACT's fiscal position. One of the most clearly concerning trajectories that the committee has highlighted, indeed, is that turnaround in interest.

The turnaround in interest from a net receipt of interest payments to a net expenditure of interest payments happened just after Mr Barr became Treasurer and has continued to this day. Indeed, over the past few years, the acceleration in that interest expense has been astounding. The trajectory now sees us on track to be spending more than \$1 billion a year on interest. It is the fastest-growing expense in our budget. We are growing more rapidly in how much we lose to interest than we are in how much we spend on health. We are growing more rapidly in how much we lose to interest than in what we spend on education. On city services, and on every sector of the budget, the fastest growing sector, very clearly, is interest, and that is driven by a ballooning debt.

As the committee has come together to note, the situation in which the ACT finds itself is deeply concerning. I might have wanted some stronger findings in this report, but we have chosen to stick to facts. The facts are as laid out in this report—without moral judgement, without applying an absolute lens. But it is very hard to argue, as the government seems intent on doing, that the ACT is in a good position.

The position set out in this report is the position set out in Mr Eslake's report. Indeed, with respect to the evidence that we saw across the period that we considered, which

came from the last estimates process, from the Pegasus report from last year, right through to today, everyone agrees on what the facts are, it seems, except for the government.

Things like a clear fiscal strategy have been argued for by every independent consultant that has engaged in this. It was put forward through the estimates process last year. The government has tried to tell us right through that it is entirely adequate. One of the important parts of this report is that it drives home the message that, actually, the ACT does need a clear and measurable fiscal strategy.

I thank my colleagues. I thank them for enduring my concerted standing-up for the people of Canberra and the fiscal sustainability of the budget and, at times, strident views which, at times, they did not fully come to agree with. This is an incredibly important report, and it is an incredibly important step along the way to the final report which will be delivered later this year.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Canberra Institute of Technology—Chief Executive Officer— order to table documents

MR PARTON (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (11.38): Pursuant to standing order 213A, I move:

That, in accordance with standing order 213A, the Assembly:

- (1) orders the Minister for Skills, Training and Industrial Relations to produce all documents relating to:
 - (a) advice provided to the Minister on the appointment of Dr Margot McNeill as Chief Executive Officer of the Canberra Institute of Technology (CIT);
 - (b) all communication, including correspondence and briefing notes, between the Minister and the CIT Board regarding complaints made against Dr McNeill during her employment at TAFE NSW;
 - (c) any explanation sought by the Minister from the CIT Board as to why these matters only emerged after Dr McNeill's appointment as CEO;
 - (d) Dr McNeill's employment contract as CEO of CIT;
 - (e) advice received by the Minister on the due diligence undertaken by the CIT Board during the recruitment process; and
 - (f) application materials submitted by Dr McNeill for the CEO role, including references from TAFE NSW;
- (2) requires the Minister to table the above documents no later than Wednesday, 25 March 2026; and
- (3) agrees that any Member may take note of documents tabled under this motion on the next sitting day after their tabling.

There is not much need for me to speak to this motion, because it speaks for itself, so I will be very brief. We look forward to the statement coming from Mr Milligan later today as the chair of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts and Administration.

He will be announcing an inquiry—according to the notice paper at least—into the CIT CEO recruitment process, as per the wishes of this chamber. The documents that we are calling for today will likely assist those hearings. It would not be possible to arrive at a conclusion in any investigation into the recruitment process without securing these documents.

We applaud the generosity of the minister in offering to table some of the documents during question time—offering to table some of those documents that are captured in this motion—but we note that, under the standing orders pertaining to question time and matters taken on notice, the minister has 30 days from his original statement in the chamber to table those documents. Given the speed that things are moving in this space, we felt the need to escalate the process.

At the end of the day, all we are trying to do as the opposition is to ensure that the ratepayers and the residents of the ACT are getting value for money in the CIT space. It is pretty easy to make the case that, in recent years, that has not occurred. I commend the motion to the Assembly.

MR PETTERSSON (Yerrabi—Minister for Business, Arts and Creative Industries, Minister for Children, Youth and Families, Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Minister for Skills, Training and Industrial Relations) (11.40): I thank Mr Parton for this motion under standing order 213A, and I thank him for putting this on the notice paper and giving me the opportunity to consider these matters.

I have no qualms with being able to produce what is being requested in the timeframe that has been presented. It potentially could prove a challenge. The documents are being sought by tomorrow, but, if any problems arise in trying to get this documentation as requested, I will come back to the chamber.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (11.40): I will speak slightly longer than that, if that is all right. I thank and applaud the Canberra Liberals and Mr Parton for their persistence and the urgency that they are showing in pursuit of transparency, scrutiny, and accountability in relation to this issue. I very much look forward to the tabling of the documents tomorrow and agree that this is an urgent matter. As a member of the Standing Committee on Economics, Industry and Recreation, our functions regularly include reviewing significant appointments. This was not an appointment about which we had any oversight, following reforms dating back to 2014 which established the CIT Board responsible for matters like this, including appointment of CEOs, rather than the minister holding that responsibility. Of course, no consultation with the committee was required for this appointment. That consultation occurs with only the minister.

What part of the tabling of these documents will show us and the inquiry that is commencing into this is that we need to ask whether recent events are an indication that the reforms are not working. Suggestions repeated publicly by the chair of the CIT Board, Ms Lundy, that Dr McNeill received legal advice that she should not disclose the ongoing misconduct investigations to which she was subject are alarming and a bit hard to believe. Legal advice to lie in a significant job application process just does not pass the pub test, to say the least. If it transpires that Dr McNeill did indeed provide false or misleading information in her application, there will be questions raised, I am sure, regarding whether this is grounds for dismissal.

Most ACT government job applications, including for much more junior roles than this one, contain a tick box requiring the applicant to disclose whether they have been found to have engaged in misconduct or are currently subject to an investigation, or have resigned while subject to a formal misconduct investigation. Here is one job application that my team found for the Senior Director of Professional Standards, Registration Services and Strategic Initiatives at the ACT Teacher Quality Institute. This is for a current application, a job that is open. It is a SOGA role. The first question is: “Have you ever been found to have engaged in misconduct or are you currently subject to any investigation related to misconduct?”—yes; no; unsure. Other questions include: “Have you resigned or ended your employment while you were subject to a formal misconduct investigation?”—yes; no; unsure. There are the same tick boxes for all of them. “Have you been the subject of an investigation relating to disclosable conduct—that is, an action or a policy, practice or procedure that is maladministration that results in a substantial and specific danger to public health or safety or the environment?” “Have you been found to have engaged in corrupt conduct in the ACT or as a result of any other Integrity Commission investigation in another jurisdiction?” And, finally: “Do you have any other relevant information to disclose about your general conduct, such as relevant police records, convictions or reportable conduct and/or conflicts of interest to help determine your suitability?”

We have a question to ask, and hopefully it will be answered tomorrow, regarding whether this job application contained any of these tick boxes. If it did not, why not? If it did, did Dr McNeill tick the appropriate boxes? There are so many questions yet to be answered, but I hope the minister will provide full transparency on it as soon as possible. I welcome his remarks in the chamber today in that regard. Did Ms Lundy call the head of TAFE NSW to reference-check their top candidate, noting she was about to make a hugely significant appointment? Did she put in a call to make absolutely certain about the person they were about to appoint, who was employed at that time by TAFE NSW?

This is an appointment they were making following years of disarray, disruption and a finding of serious corrupt conduct against the most recent CEO of the organisation. Was a call made to ensure the proposed appointee did not have any skeletons in the closet and there was no risk, and that this was the right person to set the CIT on a better path. Or did the recruitment panel just get written references and call it a day? Is having a board creating distance between the responsible minister and the operations and are key decision-making processes at the CIT actually working, or, given multiple controversial CEO appointments, is it time to revisit governance arrangements for CIT?

These are some of the many questions our community expect to see answered as a top priority, both to restore public confidence in how CIT is been run and, importantly, to get the CIT back on track for the benefit of students and staff alike, whom I really feel for in having to navigate such an extended period of controversial disruptions to their experience at CIT.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (11.45): I thank Mr Parton for bringing on this motion for today. We will support it. I also thank the minister for his engagement with the question and willingness to cooperate with the production of documents. I appreciate that the timeframes that are specified within the motion are extremely short. I believe these are

partly being driven by the fact that the hearings are scheduled to be held on Monday. Therefore, whilst there might be some practicalities in terms of timeframes for the production of documents, it should be kept in mind—in order to ensure full questions may be asked during the public hearings—that, if at all possible, those documents should be in the public domain to allow members to effectively ask the questions required of the representatives of the CIT.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Legal Affairs—Standing Committee Scrutiny report 17

MS BARRY (Ginninderra) (11.46): I present the following report:

Legal Affairs—Standing Committee (Legislative Scrutiny Role)—Scrutiny Report 17, dated 23 March 2026, together with extracts of the relevant minutes of proceedings and revised extracts of relevant minutes of proceedings for Report 16.

I seek leave to make a brief statement.

Leave granted.

MS BARRY: Scrutiny report 17 contains the committee's comments on amendments to one bill, two government responses to comments on bills, five pieces of subordinate legislation and one government response to comments on subordinate legislation. The report was circulated to members when the Assembly was not sitting.

I commend the report to the Assembly.

Public Accounts and Administration—Standing Committee Statement by chair

MR MILLIGAN (Yerrabi) (11.47): Pursuant to standing order 246A, I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts and Administration relating to a new inquiry. On Thursday, 19 March 2026, the Assembly passed a motion which requested the committee to inquire into the recruitment process of the current CIT CEO and report by 4 May 2026. The committee has decided to hold an inquiry, has called for submissions and will be scheduling a public hearing. Submissions for this inquiry are open until 30 March 2026. Public hearing details will be published when they are determined.

Planning (Missing Middle Housing) Amendment Bill

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) (11.48): I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

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

I am pleased to present the Planning (Missing Middle Housing) Amendment Bill 2026 to the Assembly. This bill contains a package of amendments to the Planning Act 2023 and the Planning (General) Regulation 2023, aimed at complementing the Missing Middle Housing Reforms to the Territory Plan, which are currently undergoing inquiry by the Standing Committee on Environment and Planning.

While minor and administrative in nature, this bill will help speed up the progress of missing middle projects through the planning system by streamlining assessment pathways and de-coupling lease variations from the development application process for these types of developments. These changes also go towards the efficient and timely operation of our planning system by ensuring it remains practical and proportionate as we progress planning reforms to expand housing choice across Canberra's suburbs.

This bill also directly delivers on actions under my Statement of Planning Priorities 2025-2028 and forms an important part of the ACT government's Construction Productivity Agenda, removing regulatory barriers and streamlining pathways in the planning and building approvals process without compromising on quality. This will support more missing middle homes for Canberrans to be built sooner.

A key amendment in this bill is updating the definition of a subdivision development proposal. The missing middle housing reforms propose to reduce restrictions on block subdivisions and consolidations in residential zones in the Territory Plan. However, under the current act, even a simple two-block residential subdivision is classified as a significant development for the purpose of development assessments. This triggers more onerous requirements, including the longest total decision timeframe of 60 working days, two rounds of public notification totalling 30 working days, entity referrals, and the highest level of assessment fees. These requirements are appropriate for large and complex new estate subdivision proposals, where the creation of new blocks, new roads, new land uses and infrastructure requirements significantly shape our suburbs. They are not considered proportionate to the small-scale, residential subdivisions or consolidations expected in missing middle housing type redevelopments.

This bill proposes to no longer classify these lower impact subdivisions and consolidations as significant developments. Whilst they will still continue to be assessed through the development application process, it will lessen the administrative burden on proponents submitting applications and will reduce the assessment and approval timeframe down to 30 to 45 working days. This will also free up planning resources to focus on higher impact, estate-scale subdivisions, which will continue to be classified as significant developments.

This bill also proposes a new streamlined process for certain Crown lease variations. Under the current planning system, all lease variations require a development application to be lodged and approved. This means that low-impact lease variations,

such as increasing the number of dwellings on a block, must go through the full development application process and timeframes to have the change approved. These are the types of lease variations that will be required to support missing middle housing redevelopments and typically have a pre-determined or codified lease variation charge applying.

Given the low-risk and administrative nature of this process, this bill introduces an exempt development pathway for these simple, low-impact residential lease variations, thus removing them from the development application pathway. Instead, these streamlined decisions will be made by the Territory Planning Authority within 10 working days, significantly reducing the assessment timeframe compared to development applications, lowering the administrative workload on the authority, and, most importantly, giving lessees and proponents greater certainty. This bill does not change the requirement of a development application for the design and siting of the additional dwellings.

Finally, this bill would “read in” a second residence, also known as a granny flat, entitlement to all residential leases. Currently, lessees need to apply to vary their Crown lease to add a secondary residence entitlement, despite secondary residences being subordinate to a primary dwelling—thus, unable to be separately titled—and this lease variation already being exempt from LVC. Noting this, there is no financial, assessment or procedural benefit associated with requiring leases to be varied to permit secondary residences. Therefore, the bill proposes to automatically permit secondary residences for all residential leases—the same approach currently taken for home businesses.

This bill does not change the requirement of a development application for the design and siting of secondary dwellings. However, this change is anticipated to save approximately 15 to 30 working days of administrative time per secondary residence development proposal.

This bill makes amendments that will help to complement the government’s commitment to ensuring an efficient planning system and enable the delivery of more housing across the territory without compromising on design and planning requirements. These are tangible changes that will encourage more homes and more housing choices for Canberrans and help this new housing to be built sooner.

I commend the bill to the Assembly.

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

Sitting suspended from 11.55 am to 2.00 pm

Ministerial arrangements

MR BARR (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism and Trade) (2.00): Minister Cheyne will be away from question time today. For question time, Minister Steel will take questions in City and Government Services; Minister Paterson, in the Attorney-General and Human Rights portfolios; and Minister Pettersson in the Night-time Economy portfolio.

Questions without notice

Light rail—stage 2B

MR PARTON: My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, you suggested in your appearance before the Select Committee on Fiscal Sustainability that territory expenses on capital works would likely taper off around 2030. Are you cancelling plans to get the tram to Woden by 2034? If not, how is it possible that infrastructure spending would taper off in that period given that stage 2B is not likely to come in under \$4 billion?

MR BARR: The answer to the first part of the question is no. In the second part of the question, Mr Parton is making certain assumptions on the procurement methodology and the timing of payments associated with a potential procurement methodology that is consistent with the methodology that the government has used for stage 1 and stage 2A of the project.

MR PARTON: Despite your initial answer, Chief Minister, does the diabolical state of the territory's finances put a question mark over the ACT's capacity to fund the tram to Woden?

MR BARR: Certainly the government is cognisant of both industry capacity to deliver forward infrastructure programming and the mix of that programming. In relation to the forward program there will, of course, be contributions to the delivery of infrastructure, and funding would come from a variety of sources—commonwealth contributions, proceeds from asset sales, the government budget and potentially public-private partnerships.

MS MORRIS: Chief Minister, what is the current forecast cost of stage 2B of the tram—that being from Commonwealth Park to Woden?

MR BARR: The current forecast cost I will take on notice.

ACT Fire & Rescue—hybrid electric fire truck

MS MORRIS: My question is to the Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services. On Thursday 19 March, Region Media reported the hybrid electric fire truck was taken off the road earlier that week with a seatbelt issue. Last week in question time you were asked six questions on the truck. Minister, why did you not take one of those opportunities to inform the Assembly the truck was again out of service?

DR PATERSON: Because that was not the question I was asked.

MS MORRIS: Minister, has the truck returned to service?

DR PATERSON: I will provide advice by the end of question time, but the advice to date is that, no, it is not back in service yet.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, was the truck being shadowed in the brief period from 26 February to when it was again taken off the road?

DR PATERSON: No. As members of the opposition can see on ESA's website, the shadowing process was part of getting the truck on the road for the first time, so that was a very limited period of time. The electric fire truck is able to attend fires on its own and has been able to since it became operational.

Just to provide a bit more information to the previous question, the issue this time is a seatbelt issue. So this is obviously a safety issue for our fire and rescue teams that are using the truck. It is a routine maintenance issue and they are just waiting for the seatbelt approval to be finalised.

ACT Policing—facilities

MS MORRIS: Mr Speaker, my question is to the Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services.

The government has known for many years that City Police Station and Winchester Police Centre are beyond their useful life, yet police continue to work in buildings plagued by leaks, flooding and sewage.

Minister, can you assure our police officers that construction work will finally start on a new city police station and headquarters by the end of this year?

DR PATERSON: What I can assure ACT Policing members is that the government, the Chief Police Officer and I are very committed to progressing a new city police station and headquarters. So we will continue to do that. This is obviously work that requires significant budget processes. We are going through that process.

As the opposition would be aware, we ran an expression of interest from the market to assess a broad range of solutions to the accommodation issues that we are facing. So it may not be a construction. It may not be a build-from-the-ground type of project; it might be a fit-out project with a partner. So we will continue through this process and continue to work with Infrastructure Canberra and ACT Policing for a solution.

Mr Cocks: Point of order under 118AA. The minister's response does go to the process that the government is looking to, but this question was around timeframes. I do not believe that the minister has actually responded in regard to timeframes.

MR SPEAKER: She was asked whether she could assure that construction work will start by the end of the year. She explained what she can assure. She does not need to give a yes or no. I think she did explain; she was responsive. I accept that it is not the answer that you might have wanted from the opposition, but I think she did respond and provide sufficient detail that it does not merit a 118AA.

MS MORRIS: Minister, how many serious building failures or closures have occurred at ACT Policing facilities this year?

DR PATERSON: There have been no closures of stations. There have been two issues. There was an issue in the gym with an air conditioner in City Police Station. On, I think, 7 March the whole of Canberra experienced severe thunderstorms and flooding. The Winchester Police Centre was one of the buildings impacted by that. So there was

significant leaking in parts of that building. So some officers have been moved out of their offices. The gym was affected there. We will continue to work with those teams. I would like to thank ACT Policing for their patience and their resilience in working around these issues and remind them and the opposition that we are really committed to working and progressing a new city police station and headquarters.

MS LEE: Minister, would it be acceptable for you and your own staff to work in a building that is plagued with repeated leaks, flooding and sewage incursion?

DR PATERSON: Well, the Assembly is a very similar era building to the City Police Station, and it does leak regularly.

Again, I would like to put on the record my thanks to ACT Policing members for working around these issues, and I do recognise how they impact them. As I said in the previous answer, we are really committed to working towards a new solution for them.

Planning and development—urban growth boundary

MS CLAY: My question is to the minister for planning. Today I am honoured to ask a question on behalf of Canberra's animals and their supporters, some of whom are in the gallery with us here today.

It has been almost a year since the ACT government agreed to my motion and promised to set a hard urban growth boundary for the ACT to protect the western edge, ensuring our bush capital remains naturally beautiful as we continue to build homes for our growing population. Yet, Canberrans and our animal friends are still in the dark as to where and when this line will be drawn.

When will the government take the western edge investigation area out of its development plans and resolve this so the western edge is outside the yet-to-be set urban growth boundary?

MR STEEL: I thank Ms Clay for her question. The government recognises that as Canberra continues to grow, it is important that the environmental values of the ACT are protected and enhanced. To achieve this the government brought forward a vision at the election of developing a new landscape plan for the ACT, which will be developed by the ACT's Chief Landscape Architect, who is being appointed through a process at the moment.

It is envisaged that as part of that work, which will get underway shortly, large parts of the western edge of the ACT will be protected under that plan. That will be informed by environmental studies which have been underway, as well as other studies to inform where those areas of environmental value are so that we can then go out and consult with the community on an evidence-based landscape plan for our city and for the ACT.

MS CLAY: As one of the five remaining studies for the western edge, can you provide an update on what the Ecological Values and Constraints Assessment Study is addressing and when it will be completed?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question. We will use those studies to inform

the development of a landscape plan for the ACT, which Minister Orr is leading. Once those studies have informed the plan and a draft is developed, there will be an opportunity for community consultation on that, and those studies will be published. There is as a list of those studies that are available on the ACT government's website.

MISS NUTTALL: Minister, will your government rule out all development on the western edge?

MR STEEL: The government has not made a decision to develop the western edge investigation area, but we are committed to develop a landscape plan for the ACT, which will include proactive protection of areas of environmental value in the western edge.

I appreciate that there are some people and groups that would like us to rule out development prior to those studies being conducted and informing a landscape plan being developed. We believe that the community should be consulted on those studies and the protection of areas that are identified within the plan.

ACT public service—staffing

MR CAIN: My question is to the Minister for the Public Service. Minister, CPSU representatives recently stated, before an inquiry of the fiscal sustainability committee, that ACT public service hiring decisions are hampered by unclear rules. They further stated that the requirements of the Financial Management Act, the Fair Work Act and the Work Health and Safety Act overlap and even contradict each other. Minister, do you accept that the government's staffing settings are creating that conflict?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mr Cain for the question. I do not accept the way that he has characterised this matter. We do have regular conversations with our union partners in relation to the responsibilities that exist under the Financial Management Act, the Work Health and Safety Act and the Public Sector Management Act in relation to a wide range of issues, including in relation to safe staffing and ensuring that psychosocial risks are well understood within a workplace. That is why we are committed to taking action on workload reduction. We recognise that there are areas where workload has been identified as a risk and challenge for staff. Every single directorate is working with their staff to consider opportunities for workload reduction, recognising that we have, as everybody in this place is aware, a challenging fiscal situation, which has only become more challenging in the context of the current global environment and a series of crises that we have experienced over the last few years.

We will continue to work with our industrial partners in relation to any concerns that they have on these matters. I am confident that our work health and safety settings, as well as our recruitment settings, are appropriate, but that there is overlap in consideration of these matters.

MR CAIN: Minister, what action will the government take to ensure ACT public service managers are not forced to choose between budget compliance, workplace rights and workplace safety?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Managers in the ACT public service do have obligations

under both the Financial Management Act and work health and safety. It is part of their role to balance those, in consultation with staff. There are also very clear consultation requirements in the enterprise agreement, and every directorate and work area has capacity for staff to escalate concerns about work health and safety. There are health and safety representatives that can represent the staff in relation to these matters, where there are concerns.

There is no getting away from the fact that managers are going to have responsibilities under both the Financial Management Act and the Work Health and Safety Act, and that sometimes they need to be able to manage within their budgets, while taking account of work health and safety. If that means having a conversation with their senior manager or, indeed, their minister about workload reduction, that should be part of the work that they do to manage these responsibilities. If Mr Cain is suggesting that managers should be given the——

Mr Cocks: A point of order.

MR SPEAKER: On a point of order; yes, Mr Cocks?

Mr Cocks: It appears that the minister is moving into debating the question by suggesting an alternative suggestion from Mr Cain.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I have finished.

MR SPEAKER: You have finished? Thanks, Minister. A supplementary question?

MR COCKS: Minister, is the ACT public service in this position where they are having to choose between which acts they breach because the government cannot afford permanent contracts?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I disagree with the entirety of that question from Mr Cocks. Part of the financial challenge that we have had in some areas is the lack of permanent recruitment. Canberra Health Services are a really good example of this, where the tendency has been to use agency staff to fill vacancies or to recruit to temporary positions. We are saving money now by permanently recruiting, particularly on nursing and midwifery, and reducing the use of our temporary agency staff, so we are both meeting our work health and safety and our ratios obligations and supporting fiscal sustainability of Canberra Health Services.

There are a range of other areas where permanent recruitment is more cost effective. This government has been working with the unions and directorates through the Secure Work Task Force to ensure that our public servants can have secure work across ACT government. That includes areas where we have been insourcing work so that lower paid workers have security of employment, particularly in maintenance and cleaning activities—something that those opposite have consistently opposed.

Building—trade licensing

MS TOUGH: My question is to the Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development. Minister, the biggest purchase most Canberrans will make in their

lifetime is their first home. What is the government doing to lift building quality and protect Canberrans from shoddy builders?

MR STEEL: I thank Ms Tough for her question. The government has begun consultation on the expansion of trade licensing in the ACT, and this builds off work that we have already done on developer licensing, which recognises that too often homebuyers are left to foot the bill from builders who have completed work that results in defects. With significant reforms underway to increase the supply of new homes in the territory, particularly through planning reform, the community needs to have confidence that, when these homes are built, they are built well. Licensing is a way that we can lift building quality by ensuring that the practitioners such as waterproofers, carpenters, and brick and block layers meet minimum quality standards, receive appropriate training and can be held accountable for the work that they do. Extending the chain of responsibility for building outcomes from builders to certifiers to developers means homebuyers do not face the financial consequences of the poor work of others.

Peak bodies, including Master Builders ACT, recognise that the expansion of trade licensing is an important step towards strengthening building quality, embedding accountability and building community confidence in the building and construction sector. We will work closely with the construction industry and tradies as well as we consult on these reforms to ensure that we are hitting the mark and delivering the outcomes that matter for Canberrans.

MS TOUGH: Minister, can you please outline how important lifting building quality is as the government works towards its goal of enabling 30,000 homes by 2030?

MR STEEL: The housing agenda is not just about delivering more supply; it is also about ensuring every Canberran has access to well-built, safe and sustainable homes that suit their lifestyle and their budget, and that is why we are so focused on ways to lift building quality as we work towards that goal of enabling 30,000 new homes by 2030. To deliver these homes, we need a skilled and experienced workforce—that is critical—backed by a regulatory framework that delivers the housing mix that our city needs. Whilst our city experiences significant growth over coming years, it is even more crucial that the community has confidence in the development taking place. Extending trade licensing is a key part of this, helping to improve quality and safety on sites and ensuring homes are built right first time.

We recognise that this transition for the workforce must be carefully managed so it supports rather than slows housing delivery. Strong training pathways, clear transitional arrangements and industry readiness will be critical to building capacity in our construction sector. Ultimately, better trained and better licensed trades mean higher quality homes being built, and that is vital to meeting our 2030 goals.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Minister, how will improving building quality boost construction productivity and help reduce the costs to consumers?

MR STEEL: The scheme supports broader ACT government priorities to strengthen regulatory oversight, improve transparency and boost consumer confidence in building quality. It complements initiatives such as property developer licensing, the

establishment of publicly funded building certifiers and the expansion of automatic mutual recognition. As part of our construction productivity agenda, we have listened to industry and consumers on ways to simplify and improve building and regulatory systems, reduce costs and boost construction productivity. Recognising how the industry operates in both the ACT and across the border, aligning with the New South Wales licensing scheme is important to reduce red tape for businesses, increase labour mobility and meet demands right across our region. We know that we have trades that work in the ACT and work across the border, and vice versa, and this will provide those pathways.

Whilst the scheme supports productivity, it will also reduce costs for homebuyers. Just recently, a constituent wrote to me sharing that they had received a bill for \$150,000 due to building defects. In no other industry is it acceptable to knowingly pass off defective products to consumers, and homes should be no different. Putting the onus of responsibility back onto the people actually doing the work will see fewer defects holding up the construction of new homes and consumers will be protected, and that will be a win for homebuyers and for builders who are doing the right thing.

***Close to the edge* report—government response**

MR EMERSON: My question is to the Minister for the Environment. As highlighted in the chamber earlier today, the government took 10 months to respond to the *Close to the edge* report from former ACT Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment Dr Sophie Lewis and has not provided a detailed direct response to the specific recommendations the report contains. Minister, why did the government take so long to respond to such a significant report and why have all of the commissioner's recommendations been noted, not accepted?

MS ORR: I refer the member to my comments during the ministerial statement and the discussion this morning and also to the submission itself, because some of the answers to his questions will be in that. I would also add that the government has taken the time to consider this report in the context of a number of pieces of work that are outlined within the response and within my ministerial statement, including new initiatives that we have been working through. Given that there was not a statutory timeframe for responding to the report, we took the view that it would be better to work through those pieces of work and to consider the report against those other considerations and give a more fulsome response.

As outlined in the statement and in the response, the government has taken on board and noted the recommendations. But, given that there is a lot of work in train and given that the report itself focused specifically on land use—and, as we said in the response, there are a lot of other factors that go to impacts on our environment—the government wants to again take a full view of the impacts and respond in the best way possible and not just through one lens.

MR EMERSON: Minister, will the government increase funding for nature conservation in the forthcoming budget, given the report's finding that the current level of funding indicates it is "hard to take the view that biodiversity protection is a genuine priority for the ACT" and the fact that the ACT was graded with an F for funding sufficiency on the World Wildlife Foundation's most recent Threatened Species Report

Card?

MS ORR: Decisions of budget are for the budget subcommittee, the ERC and the cabinet, and I will not be making any announcements today in question time.

MS CARRICK: Does the government support making it a legislated requirement to respond to self-initiated investigations from the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment and to do so within a specific timeframe and, if not, why not?

MS ORR: I believe that would be a change in the current policy and require a change to the legislation, and I am not in a position to make announcements in question time on new policy initiatives.

Teachers—enterprise bargaining

MISS NUTTALL: My question is to the Minister for the Public Service. Minister, noting that thousands of teachers are taking industrial action in Victoria and Tasmania, can you please share in as much detail as you are able to, how has enterprise bargaining progressed with ACT public school educators and school-based staff since July 2025?

MS BERRY: I will take that question. I am the minister responsible for education in the ACT and it is the Education Directorate that is holding those negotiations with the education union. There has been a range of meetings and consultations with the Australian Education Union and the Education Directorate. The Education Directorate has been meeting in good faith and continues to engage with the education union on a range of different claims that the education union is making on behalf of their members.

The education union has expressed some frustration at the length of time that the process is taking. I understand that frustration. I have been on the other side of those negotiations, and I have some empathy with understanding the negotiation processes of the government. I can commit to the education union—my office has been in touch with them at least three times since last night and following their release today—that we are absolutely committed to our election commitment of ensuring that ACT teachers remain the highest paid in the country and we continue to want to engage in good faith with them.

MISS NUTTALL: Minister, all that being the case, why are we hearing that public school educators in Canberra are considering protected industrial action as a result of those negotiations?

MS BERRY: Well, because the Australian Education Union is representing their membership and their membership is asking for the education union to consider taking industrial action, which is absolutely their right and I am the last person in this place who would stand between a union and taking industrial action on behalf of their members. As I said, I understand their frustrations. My office has been in touch with them at least three times today, and I know the Education Directorate will too. We want to work on the best possible outcome for our public school teachers in this town and will continue those conversations.

MS LEE: Minister, is it acceptable for the Education Directorate to take more than

seven months to respond to the claims made by the union, in which only six of those claims have been agreed to in principle?

MS BERRY: Thank you for that question. Look, as I said, I understand the frustration at the length of time these negotiations are taking. However, I can assure the education union and members of this place that our Education Directorate in the ACT is negotiating in good faith and wants to continue those conversations with the education union and we will continue to do that work in good faith. As I said, we responded to their urgent letter last night and we will continue to work with them to get the best outcome for our teachers. I think that is something that the education union, my office and the Education Directorate want to ensure. I am sure the Assembly supports that work as well.

Active travel—Civic-Woden cycleway

MS CARRICK: My question is either to the Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development or the Minister for City and Government Services. It is about the Woden to Civic cycleway.

I understand that Infrastructure Canberra, the Suburban Land Agency and the City and Environment Directorate are all tasked with delivering different sections of the Woden to Civic cycleway, with the National Capital Authority also involved in the design process. This fragmented approach risks a lack of clarity of purpose. Without a safe direct active travel route between Woden and Civic, we may miss the opportunities for encouraging significant mode shift to active travel presented by the Commonwealth Avenue Bridge works and the escalation in fuel prices.

Minister, which ACT government agency is responsible for coordinating the planning and delivery of the Woden to Civic Cycleway.

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question. We recognise that there is a lot of interest in the city to Woden cycleway. As Ms Carrick knows, the government is going out to consult with the community on active travel links in the Woden Valley and inner south as part of the draft Southern Gateway Planning and Design Framework. We are expecting that to go out for consultation around the middle of the year. The purpose of that document is to make sure that we have an aligned vision for the corridor, including those active travel links and the opportunities to reimagine the corridor as an active boulevard with much better cycling and pedestrian links. So the purpose of the plan is to get that aligned vision. We will be, of course, then progressing with those plans beyond that. Light rail has been delivered—

Ms Carrick: Point of order. The southern gateway does not go through to the city. The question was: who is responsible for coordinating all the different sections of the Civic to Woden cycleway?

MR SPEAKER: Minister, if you could explain which agency it is, which is the question being asked.

MR STEEL: Infrastructure Canberra are obviously focused on the infrastructure side of particularly delivering the light rail project, which includes some of the pedestrian

links. Then we expect there would be active travel links delivered as an allied project to light rail stage 2B. It has not been determined yet whether that would be delivered by Infrastructure Canberra or the City and Environment Directorate. It is possible that some parts of it may be delivered by one agency and other parts by another. But what is important is that we have a shared vision for those cycle links, and that is what we want to consult with the community about.

MS CARRICK: Minister, does the ACT government have the agreement of the National Capital Authority for the use of State Circle, Flynn Drive and the widened paths across Commonwealth Avenue Bridge for the C4 arterial cycleway?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question. What the NCA want to see is a strategic vision put forward to them to inform any future works approvals. They have made that very clear in relation to future development in the north Curtin residential area, and I think they would have the same approach as well in relation to any cycleway improvements, particularly those that are directly on that major approach route into the national capital. So we want to set that out in that strategic planning document through the Southern Gateway Planning and Design Framework, which will show a new vision for a multimodal corridor, including safe protected active travel cycle links.

We want to consult with the community about that design, and then we can progress with the next stages of delivering on those links that are identified in the plan. That would include, of course, engagement with the NCA through works approval processes, which probably would be necessary in the area.

I note the NCA are also undertaking some very welcome augmentation of the cycling link over Commonwealth Avenue. Through the Commonwealth Avenue bridge project, they are widening the wings to provide more room for cyclists and pedestrians alike. That is an important part of the project—that overall link from Woden to the city that they are delivering—but the ACT government of course would be responsible for other parts of the project as well. So we are looking forward to having that consultation with the community and I encourage members to provide their feedback once it is available for that feedback to be provided.

Mr Emerson: Point of order. Mr Speaker, I seek your guidance on the responsiveness of Mr Steel's answer to the question. He has spoken around the question, which was whether the ACT government has the agreement of the NCA to do these things.

MR SPEAKER: I think he was responsive. He did not give a yes or no on if they have they agreed. He outlined the fact that they in in order to get agreement, there are certain actions that the ACT government needs to take, and he outlined what those actions were that were being taken. I accept he did not give a yes or no, but I do think he went as far as to be responsive. So I do not take a point of order.

MR EMERSON: Minister, when will the design for the route of the Woden-Civic cycleway be finalised? Will it be constructed before light rail stage 2B?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. Of course, there already are cycle links on the city to Woden corridor, but we understand that there is a need, particularly on Adelaide Avenue, to provide more direct links that are on street but have that

protection. In terms of those sections where some augmentation is required and further design work, we will be consulting with the community around the middle of the year on the Southern Gateway Planning and Design Framework, and we expect then we will be able to finalise that piece of work in the following year.

The government has not made any decisions around timing for the allied works for the light rail stage 2B project. I note that some of the pedestrian works and cycle works are part of the scope of light rail stage 2B, particularly as they relate to getting cyclists and pedestrians to the light rail stops, through the creation of new pedestrian bridges near the light rail stops on Yarra Glen drive and Adelaide Avenue. So there will potentially be different delivery timeframes for that. There may be a different delivery partner for those different components of the project. The government will consider what those opportunities are to get the best procurement outcome, once we have been able to secure funding for that and once we have considered, of course, a business case for the projects.

Exhibition Park—Fitzroy Pavilion

MR PARTON: My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister in February of 2024, Mr Cain asked you a question on notice in relation to the Fitzroy Pavilion upgrades. Question 2 reads:

What are the total costs pertaining to upgrades at EPIC as part of the 2024-25 budget review.

You responded with:

Through the 2023-24 budget review, there is an allocation of \$1.9 million to progress planning for Exhibition Park in Canberra, a new Convention Centre Precinct and the Bruce Sport, Health and Education Precinct.

Chief Minister, can I ask, what is the total value of the work undertaken in relation to the Fitzroy Pavilion upgrades that were funded out of the \$1.9 million planning allocation?

MR BARR: I do not have that detail in front of me. I will take it on notice.

MR PARTON: Chief Minister, what process was used to select contractors or service providers and award contracts in relation to the upgrade of the Fitzroy Pavilion?

MR BARR: As I understand, the usual process, but I do recall that the company that won the tender subsequently went into liquidation, and a new company had to be appointed to complete the work. I think that is on the public record, but I will come back with any further information on notice in the same way as I answer the first.

MR CAIN: Chief Minister, who was contracted to undertake the works and on what date were agreements entered into?

MR BARR: Just to seek some clarity from Mr Cain, the original works or once the—

MR CAIN: Both will do, thank you. All will do.

MR BARR: All will do. Okay, I will take them all on notice then.

Public Housing—debt to commonwealth

MR COCKS: My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, the *Canberra Times* has reported that the commonwealth has refused to waive the territory's public housing debt. This revelation came a week after the Auditor-General's report into ACT public housing was released. Is the commonwealth government's refusal to waive the public housing debt evidence of a poor relationship with the federal Labor Party?

MR BARR: No.

MR COCKS: Chief Minister, why can't you negotiate a waiver of the historic \$66 million debt, while the feds rip us off on GST?

MR BARR: We remain engaged with the commonwealth on this and other matters.

MR MILLIGAN: Was the money requested in response to the Auditor-General's report?

MR BARR: Could you repeat the question, Mr Milligan?

MR MILLIGAN: Was the money requested in response to the Auditor-General's report?

MR BARR: I am not sure that I follow the line of questioning there, so I will take it on notice, to get some clarity in relation to the line of questions.

Budget—superannuation

MS LEE: My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, during the fiscal sustainability committee inquiry, the Chief Minister claimed that the ACT government was paying half a billion dollars towards the superannuation liability every year, yet the budget papers show the total defined benefit superannuation liability is still increasing while the unfunded portion continues to fall. How can the government claim that it is paying down the liability by half a billion dollars a year when the gross liability is actually rising and the annual appropriation is largely meeting current benefit payments?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question and point her towards the budget papers, which show that this is going to be an ongoing liability for the territory until it is paid down. At this stage, that is in 2033-34. I think it was Pegasus Economics who looked into this on behalf of the Select Committee on Estimates last year, and they determined it would be paid down at that point and it will free up a significant amount of room in the budget because we do not have to continue to fund the unfunded liability from that point. That is some way in the future. In the meantime, the government will continue to focus on making sure that the budget is in a sustainable position.

MS LEE: Will the Treasurer confirm that what is falling is not the total superannuation liability but only the unfunded gap between the liability and the assets set aside against it?

MR STEEL: I will take that on notice.

MR COCKS: Treasurer, is the government counting investment returns as if they were a budget saving or an appropriation and then claiming credit for paying down a liability that is actually increasing? If you do not understand, it is okay.

MR STEEL: No. What we are recognising is that we have to fund the commonwealth for the superannuation liability that was inherited by the ACT government at self-government and we are trying to present the ACT budget to account for that fact so that we can make decisions based on the true state of the ACT budget now. Other states and territories in the commonwealth account for the investments that they make in the superannuation of their employees in a way that the ACT cannot, so we have made an adjustment that makes sure that we transparently account for that so that we can inform proper decision-making based on the true state of the ACT's finances. This is a transparency measure in the budget. I encourage members to read the 2007-08 budget papers, where Treasury clearly sets out the reasons this superannuation adjustment is made in the ACT budget which has been adopted since then as the primary—

Mr Cocks: Mr Speaker, on a point of order going to relevance: perhaps the Treasurer has become a bit confused. The question was not about the superannuation adjustment but, indeed, about the superannuation liability and the appropriation that goes to paying benefits. I know it is a technical one.

MR SPEAKER: On relevance, your question was about whether the government was presenting something in a certain way, and the very first word from the Treasurer was no, so he has answered your question very directly in a yes or no fashion. He then provided further information, but he answered the question in basically his first response by answering your question with a no. So I think he has been relevant. He has provided further information. I do not think there is a point of order, Mr Cocks.

ACT public service—enterprise bargaining

MR BRADDOCK: My question is to the Minister for the Public Service. Minister, I note that the illegal war in Iran has resulted in a predictable increase in fuel prices that is expected to significantly add to inflation. The RBA's forecasts of underlying inflation were previously expected to peak at 3.7 per cent in 2026, before accounting for this new development, and they have, as of Tuesday last week, raised the official cash rate, which will further push up the cost of living. Against this backdrop, you have made pay offers to the ACT public service which appear to be well below these new expectations for inflation. What are you doing to ensure that ACT public servants' wages keep up with the cost of living?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mr Braddock for the question. Obviously this is something that we are very cognisant of. I would also note that the increase in inflation and the increase in fuel costs also create additional pressure on the ACT budget. ACT government services, like households, are not immune to these pressures, and we have to balance what we can offer for our workforce to ensure that they are fairly and appropriately paid with what the budget can actually afford. That is what we believe we

have done in making an offer of a three per cent pay rise each year over the life of the agreement and an additional half a per cent superannuation to be achieved before the end of the three-year agreement, bringing the ACT to the highest rate of employer superannuation contribution across states and territories. We recognise that the commonwealth is of course higher, and closing that gap in one go would be a very expensive exercise.

This is a challenging situation for everyone. The ACT government, as an employer, makes a range of other opportunities for people in terms of flexible work—not just working from home but also working from the hubs that exist across our town centre ACT government offices, so that people can work closer to home and reduce their travel costs by assessing those through public transport and reducing their parking costs. I know there will be a debate later today in relation to public transport. We will continue to work with our unions. We have also made a very significant offer around parental leave, which has been welcomed by the union, and also agreed language around safe staffing, which has also been welcomed.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, do you agree that the pay offer will not keep up with inflation and that, therefore, the living standards of ACT public servants will go backwards?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: The impact of fuel on inflation will hit different people differently. For example, those people who have electric vehicles will not feel the impact of fuel prices directly but may feel that impact indirectly through the cost of other goods and services if they increase accordingly. We also have no idea how long or short-lived the impact of these fuel price increases will be. We do not know what is going to happen in the Middle East over the next little while. So our inflation estimates are going to be quite challenging over the next little period of time.

I would just go back to what I said to Mr Braddock in response to the first question. We recognise that this is a challenging situation. We are, of course, in the context of the budget overall, thinking about what we can do to support Canberrans broadly, including ACT public servants, in relation to the challenges that we face. But those challenges are also faced by the ACT government in terms of increasing the challenges right across the budget and the cost of delivering the services that Canberrans rely on.

MISS NUTTALL: Minister, will you be further revising your pay offer to the ACT public service, so that it at least matches inflation forecasts?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Miss Nuttall for the supplementary. The offer that we have on the table is the current core offer. We have not indicated any intention to change that offer. This offer is the best that we think we can do at this point in time, given the significant constraints that we have on our fiscal flexibility and recognising that there are a range of other measures that can be taken that relate to the cost of living. So, no, we do not have an intention of making another offer at this point in time. But, as the Deputy Chief Minister said, we continue to bargain in good faith with the unions; we continue to listen to their feedback; and we continue to consider what we can do across other measures.

I think it is also really important to recognise the very significant offers that have been

made in relation to leave, in relation to safe staffing and in relation to a number of other matters. The ACT public service has very good conditions and, for many areas of the public service, is among the best paid, if not the best paid, in the country compared to the same roles in other states and territories. I think it is really important to recognise that.

Crime—organised crime

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: My question is to the Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services. Minister, can you provide an update to the Assembly on how the ACT Labor government is combatting organised crime?

DR PATERSON: I would like to thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for his question. The ACT government is strongly committed to supporting ACT police to address organised crime.

On Saturday, 21 March, the Comancheros attempted to conduct a run from Mitchell to Tharwa homestead. ACT police enacted significant disruption activities with their partners across the border in New South Wales, NSW Police taskforce Raptor. ACT Policing established a vehicle checkpoint in Mitchell and issued defect notices to over half the bikes involved in the run for non-roadworthy bikes, as well as a couple of vehicles. Two arrests were made and there was one seizure of a prohibited item. This disruption activity resulted in the majority of the members being without transportation for their proposed ride, which resulted in it being cancelled.

I would like to acknowledge and thank members of ACT Policing's Taskforce Invidia and supporting teams, including NSW Police's taskforce Raptor, for their planning and professional management over the weekend.

Last week I, alongside the Chief Police Officer, announced that the ACT government will draft legislation to ban the public display of OMCG insignia. It is our intention to introduce the legislation before the end of the year. OMCG insignia includes patches, logos and other insignia where they are used to identify membership, intimidate the community and recruit new members. This is a clear statement of intent by the government that it takes organised crime seriously and that organised crime has no place in the territory.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Minister, what impact do you expect a ban on OMCG insignia to have on their criminal activity?

DR PATERSON: Disruption of criminal networks is central to this policy. The banning of OMCG insignia supports disruption efforts currently undertaken by ACT Policing. A restriction on the public display of insignia reduces the ability of members to display their affiliations, weakening gang cohesion and disrupting recruitment activities. These reforms will also reduce public intimidation. OMCG members often wear insignia in public to assert their control of public spaces. The display of such symbols deters the public from reporting criminal behaviour and creates an atmosphere of fear. I would like to thank the Australian Federal Police Association for the work they have done in the research leading up an advocacy for this particular legislation.

MS TOUGH: Minister, how can Firearm Prohibition Orders be used to respond to organised crime?

DR PATERSON: I thank Ms Tough for the question. On 24 February, earlier this year, I introduced a bill to create the Firearm Prohibition Order scheme in the ACT. The intent of this reform is to disrupt illegal firearm activity and reduce the risk of firearm related violence.

An FBO is a court order that gives police officers an additional mechanism to ensure high-risk individuals do not acquire, possess or use firearms or firearm-related items. These laws are designed to keep firearms out of the hands of people who pose a serious risk to our community, such as those involved in organised crime and terrorism and high-risk domestic and family violence perpetrators.

There are key differences between this legislation and the FPO schemes in other jurisdictions. This includes that orders can only be issued by a magistrate and are open to additional review, appeal and independent oversight mechanisms.

Key features built into the bill include safeguarding rights, where courts must consider human rights, culture, social needs and the impact on family life before issuing an order. Search powers allow police to search a person subject to an FPO, their vehicle, residence or storage facility, without a warrant to ensure compliance with an order. Accountability and transparency requirements are through annual reporting by the Chief Police Officer on the use of the FPO scheme and associated reporting requirements to the minister and the ACT Ombudsman.

The government is also committed through this legislation to conduct a formal review of the scheme and a review of the scheme's ongoing compatibility with human rights three years after it commences. I look forward to working with members of the Assembly and the committee as they inquire into this bill along with other firearms reforms.

Public transport—patronage

MR BRADDOCK: My question is for the Minister for Transport.

Minister, I draw your attention to a 2015 ACT government cabinet discussion paper titled *Transport for Canberra - Mode Share Targets*, which was released this week as an accessible executive record. The 2015 paper describes how the ACT's mode share results are well under target and that, in order to achieve a 2026 mode share target of 16 per cent of public transport, Treasury estimated that the bus fleet would need to increase to 858 buses by 2026, or 2.3 times the size of the fleet in 2015. This is before accounting for light rail.

Minister, what is the current size of the ACT government's bus fleet?

MR STEEL: Last time I checked it was around 450 buses, but I will come back to the Assembly on notice with the specific number. I will address the other part of the lead in to the question. The ACT transport strategy does not set a mode shift target. The reason for that is that at the time that it was established, in 2020, we were in the midst

of a global pandemic and people's lives were being transformed and particularly in the way that they moved around our city. More flexible working arrangements were coming in, such as working from home. People were changing their habits.

We outlined in that strategy ways to encourage people to use public transport. That included continued investment in things like right rail that do build capacity in our transport network to move more passengers with more frequent services. And we continue to outline our plans to improve frequency as a key driver of mode shift through, for example, ACT Labor's transport plan that we brought to the election. Those commitments, together with the Greens' commitments, are of course outlined in the supply and confidence agreement. We are committed to delivering on those.

To get those additional rapid services and to improve frequency of existing services does require more buses—and more drivers, by the way. That is why we committed to purchasing 110 buses this term in addition to the buses in our fleet. That will provide the opportunity for growth of the transport network to meet the growing needs of our population and to encourage even more people to get onto buses, in addition to light rail and the work that we are doing to extend light rail down to the south side.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, when do you realistically expect ACT's mode share for public transport to reach 16 per cent?

MR STEEL: The government does not have any mode share targets. But, of course, we have committed to a refresh of the planning strategy and the transport strategy. We are looking at how we can integrate land use planning and transport planning. As part of that, we will be focusing on transport oriented development, which is an opportunity to have more people living directly next to public transport connections, rapid buses and future light rail services and the existing light rail line, to provide opportunities for them to use public transport and then to have that positive feedback loop where, as more people use public transport, we can then increase the level of service to the residents in our city. I know that Minister Orr is also thinking about this in the context of developing the next climate strategy for the ACT and the action plans. Transport is a major source of emissions. And so the actions in that climate strategy and action plan will be focused on transport, including public transport. We are already working very closely together in the development of that plan and the actions that we need to take to support even more people to use public transport in our city.

MS CLAY: Minister, given government set mode share targets 12 years ago, why can't we have real mode share targets now instead of an aspirational target that we have no intention of reaching?

MR STEEL: I will just reiterate that there is no mode share target in the ACT Transport Strategy 2020, but we are of course focused on practical ways of supporting people to move onto public transport and take up sustainable transport options. Those are outlined in the strategy; they are outlined in the active travel plan, as a sub strategy; and of course they are outlined in the existing planning strategy and will be in the updated planning strategy.

We will look at the opportunities to encourage more people to public transport with the proven means that we know have worked in other cities around the world. Frequency

is part of that, and that is why my focus is on improving services to Canberrans to make sure that they had that opportunity to use public transport.

We are starting from a pretty good place. We have the best coverage in the country out of any major city in terms of people living within 400 metres of a bus stop. But frequency is freedom. We know that and that is why we have had a big focus on frequency in the 2019 reforms to the bus network. When we introduced all of the new Rapids that was about improving the frequency of services to more Canberrans. With the introduction of light rail, the service is incredibly frequent—every five minutes during the morning peak. We want to extend that benefit down to the south side so that more people can benefit from mass transit options. But importantly it also needs to be combined with land use planning so more people can live near these transport options and those mass transit routes, both rapid buses and light rail.

Domestic and family violence programs—commonwealth funding

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Minister for the Prevention of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence. Last week, the minister told the Assembly that the ACT government received funding for 7.6 new frontline workers and so provided funding for eight workers to local service providers.

Can the minister confirm that this funding was used to engage new workers, consistent with the commitments made to the commonwealth?

DR PATERSON: I will take that on notice and provide some more information, but I did meet two of the workers at the YWCA who were directly employed from that funding. That money is contracted with our domestic, family and sexual violence services. I will come back to the chamber with some more detail.

MS CASTLEY: Could the minister confirm if any of the funding was used to extend or replace expiring programs?

DR PATERSON: No; the money was for workers for programs.

MS BARRY: Could the minister please provide the Assembly with the annual dollar amounts of federal and territory funding for each organisation?

DR PATERSON: Yes, I will. I provided the overall amount last sitting, as well as the number of workers that were allocated to each organisation. Just to provide feedback and context for the Assembly, the government has to report back to the federal government on these figures as well. So there is a reporting back to the federal government to account for this money.

Exhibition Park—Fitzroy Pavilion—Procurement

MR PARTON: My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, on 26 February, in question time in this fine chamber, you were asked a question about the Fitzroy Pavilion project management agreement, work order 62154. Directly following question time, this contract disappeared from the online contracts register. Chief Minister, did you or your office contact anyone in the ACT public service regarding the

contract?

MR BARR: I certainly did not, because I was sitting in the chamber. I will check that. I would be very surprised if anyone did. To put any conspiracy to bed, I will confirm that and find out why said contract was not on the website.

MR PARTON: Chief Minister, did any minister or their staff direct or request the removal of that contract from the register?

MR BARR: I do not believe so. Again, for clarity, I will take that on notice and confirm it. That is a lot of people that we will need to confirm with, but we will do that for the Assembly.

MR COCKS: Chief Minister, did you or any of your ministers receive a briefing or information on why this contract was removed from the contracts register?

MR BARR: I have not. I would need to check with others, but I would presume not. I am not sure what the conspiracy theory is here, but in taking that on notice, I will respond to the other questions as well.

All further questions can be placed on the notice paper.

Supplementary answers to questions without notice Budget—superannuation

MR STEEL: In relation to the question asked by Ms Lee which went to the issue of whether the unfunded superannuation liability has grown, I can now provide a response. Superannuation expenses are in relation to the defined benefit superannuation liabilities associated with current and past ACT employee membership of the commonwealth superannuation schemes, including the Commonwealth Superannuation Scheme, the CSS, and the Public Sector Superannuation Scheme, the PSS, and defined contribution superannuation arrangements, including the commonwealth's Public Sector Superannuation Accumulation Plan, known as the PSSAP, and choice of fund arrangements for existing staff.

The total superannuation interest cost for the defined benefit superannuation liabilities, the increase in interest cost expense of \$17.4 million in the 2025-26 budget from the 2024-25 estimated outcome, is due to the most recent defined benefit superannuation liability valuation review and the projected growth in the liability.

The government maintains a funding plan to extinguish the territory's unfunded defined benefit superannuation liability over time. The funding plan involves the accumulation of funds in the Superannuation Provision Account. A budget appropriation is applied to the annual benefit payments, with investment earnings reinvested to increase the pool of investment assets to reduce the longer term cost of this obligation. Once the unfunded liability is reduced to nil, the government will no longer be required to make a budget appropriation equivalent to the benefit payments.

Over the past 28 financial years, from 1996-97 to 2023-24, the Superannuation Provision Account investment portfolio has achieved an average investment return of

CPI plus 5.1 per cent per annum, which continues to exceed the current long-term investment return objective of CPI plus 4.75 per cent per year. Page 228 of the budget outlines that, while this liability itself may grow, over time the unfunded liability shrinks, and the budget estimates that the percentage funded grows from 66.8 per cent in 2025-26 to 79.1 per cent in 2028-29.

ACT Fire & Rescue—hybrid electric fire truck

DR PATERSON: I would like to respond on the electric fire truck issue. We are still awaiting certification of the seatbelt, so it is not currently on the road.

Domestic and family violence programs—commonwealth funding

DR PATERSON: In response to Ms Castley's question, it was \$2.495 million in commonwealth funding for the 500 workers; that was our contribution. The ACT topped up \$0.776 million. This totalled, in 2022-23, \$3.271 million over four years. I will take on notice the figure allocated to each organisation. As I said last week, CRCC received four positions, YWCA received two positions, mHUB received one position and DVCS received 0.6 of a position.

As I responded last week, we are currently working with the commonwealth to understand what the allocation of funding will be for the next 500 workers. Once we are aware of that money, we will start a discussion with the services in terms of how that is allocated.

Papers

Mr Speaker presented the following papers:

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People Act, pursuant to section 12—Office of the ACT Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Children & Young People Commissioner—Annual Statement 2025, undated.

Government Agencies (Campaign Advertising) Act, pursuant to section 20—Independent Reviewer Report for the period 1 July to 31 December 2025, dated 1 March 2026 prepared by Bill Campbell AO KC.

Mr Steel, pursuant to standing order 211, presented the following papers:

Education and Care Services National Law as applied by the law of the States and Territories—Education and Care Services National Amendment Regulations 2026 (2026 No 52) dated 23 February 2026, together with an explanatory statement.

Subordinate legislation (including explanatory statements unless otherwise stated)

Legislation Act, pursuant to section 64—

Board of Senior Secondary Studies Act—Board of Senior Secondary Studies Appointment 2026 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2026-20 (LR, 10 March 2026).

Canberra Institute of Technology Act and Financial Management Act—

Canberra Institute of Technology (CIT Board Chair) Appointment 2026

(No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2026-18 (LR, 10 March 2026).

Canberra Institute of Technology (CIT Board Deputy Chair) Appointment 2026 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2026-19 (LR, 10 March 2026).

Medicines, Poisons and Therapeutic Goods Regulation—Medicines, Poisons and Therapeutic Goods (Vaccinations by Pharmacists) Direction 2026 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2026-23 (LR, 12 March 2026).

Unit Titles (Management) Act—

Unit Titles (Management) Rental Certificate Determination 2026—Disallowable Instrument DI2026-21 (LR, 10 March 2026).

Unit Titles (Management) Sale Certificate Determination 2026—Disallowable Instrument DI2026-22 (LR, 10 March 2026).

South Canberra—access to late-night pharmacy services

MS TOUGH (Brindabella) (3.08): I move:

That this Assembly:

- (1) notes that:
 - (a) community pharmacy is an important part of healthcare in Canberra beyond filling prescriptions;
 - (b) community pharmacy plays a role in preventative health services, vaccinations, treating minor illness and injuries, chronic condition management and is a trusted source of healthcare and information;
 - (c) late-night pharmacies play a specific and vital role in the provision of healthcare;
 - (d) pharmacies that open late into the night fill a gap in healthcare provision by ensuring people have access to medicines and health advice at a time when other healthcare options are limited; and
 - (e) while not every pharmacy can be a late-night pharmacy, distribution across the city is required to ensure equitable access to healthcare;
- (2) further notes that:
 - (a) currently there are no late-night pharmacies on the southside, with the latest opening pharmacies closing at 9pm on weeknights and none opening past 8.30pm on weekends;
 - (b) there have previously been late-night pharmacies in Woden and Tuggeranong closing at 10pm every night of the week; and
 - (c) on the northside there are at least four pharmacies that are open until 10pm or later every night of the week, including one open until midnight seven nights a week in Belconnen; and
- (3) calls on the Government to:
 - (a) explore partnerships and other opportunities to work with pharmacies on the southside of Canberra to expand opening hours to become late-night pharmacies that close no earlier than 10pm every night of the week; and
 - (b) report back to the Assembly by the end of February 2027.

Mr Speaker, I will start by painting a picture for you. It is late at night, you have been trying to put a child to bed, and it turns out that they are unwell, but you have run out of children's Panadol. Or it is late at night, you have been in the Canberra Hospital and have been discharged, but you need to fill a script. Or it is late at night, you are diabetic, like my colleague, and you are out of insulin.

If, like me, you have been in one of these situations or know someone that has, the first thing you will do is find a pharmacy to go to. But access is not equal across Canberra. On the south side of Canberra, we currently do not have a late-night pharmacy. On the north side, by my count, there are at least four open until 10 pm or later.

This is not some northside-southside fight, but a recognition that there is a lack of access to a late-night pharmacy on the south side. I am not going to be greedy. A 10 pm closing time would be a start, like Wanniasa Capital Chemist used to be, but 11 pm, like O'Connor and Northbourne, would be incredible, and so would midnight, like Belconnen. I want to acknowledge that there is one that closes at 9 pm on a weeknight in Tuggeranong and at 8.30 on weekends, which is something, but it is not what the north side has.

Community pharmacies are an important pillar of healthcare access. For many, a trusted local pharmacist or pharmacy plays an important role in a person's overall health care and can provide advice on a range of health questions, including the interaction of medications, the use of over-the-counter medication, and general advice, particularly around minor ailments. They work hand-in-hand with GPs, walk-in centres and emergency departments to provide health care to people when they need it.

Pharmacies can be a quicker source of health advice than other practitioners for minor ailments. On evenings or late nights, when GP access is more difficult and wait times can be higher at walk-in centres and emergency, pharmacies can be there to help with a sick child, a cough or a bout of gastro—something where you know you need some medical attention, and a pharmacy can be the one to help you. Even with things like a UTI now, with the expanded scope of practice here in the ACT, it is something that they can help you with.

I have spoken before in the chamber about my first job being in a community pharmacy. I did not think that that job I got after school on one day a week, at 15, at the local chemist, because my family was constantly there picking up medications, would have taught me so much about health care and community.

Pharmacists are who people turn to when they have a question about medication or a minor ailment—from coughs and colds to helping pick the right dietary supplement to help a picky eater, and whose doctor has prescribed one. Trust me, I have been there with a pharmacist, working out the best iron supplements for someone who does not want to take disgusting-tasting medication. It is a pharmacist and a pharmacy assistant who have that experience in knowing what is the right over-the-counter medication. They have that really important role in our community.

You might be wondering, Mr Deputy Speaker, where I got the idea for this motion from. Not only is it my own experience from living in Tuggeranong, not being able to get a script filled late at night and running out of kids' Panadol; it is the experience of

countless constituents who raise this issue with me all the time. It is not just a popular idea that is raised with me when I am doorknocking and standing at shopping centre mobile offices. Even at lunchtime today, when I went on ABC Radio Canberra, someone called Toni called up to share her experience of waiting for a pharmacy to open in the morning to get medication to treat a sick family member who had been suffering from gastro and had become dehydrated. They were able to see a doctor that night online and get a script, but they could not access medication to treat them.

This is a story that is repeated to me over and over again throughout Tuggeranong, because we used to have one that was open until 10 pm, and we do not anymore. We are lucky in Tuggeranong to have the earliest-opening pharmacy in Canberra, with a 7 am opening time, and the reports are that this is going well. People turn up as soon as they open. Sometimes people have been waiting outside, because it is 7 am, and they have been waiting all night and there is someone there to help them. The owner-operator there has passed on to me that it is busy, and it is working for them really well each day, in providing that service.

What are some of the barriers being faced by pharmacies that are preventing them from being late-night pharmacies? I cannot speak for all of them, but having spoken to a few pharmacists, there are a couple of things that come up. One is being in an area with foot traffic late at night. This is for a few reasons. Obviously, foot traffic will increase business. If someone is walking by to go to the supermarket and remembers that they need something from the chemist, they can just drop in. It also provides passive surveillance and makes customers feel safer. When there is a supermarket that is open at night, sometimes that supermarket is contributing to or covering the cost of security at that shopping centre, which benefits the pharmacy and means they are not liable for that cost.

I know that at least one of the late-night pharmacies on the north side has security and is covering the cost of that themselves, as part of their business's decision to provide a late-night service for their community. I know this is one of the reasons that Wanniasa changed post COVID. When changes were made to the opening hours of the shopping centre and of Coles, it made sense for the pharmacy to change its opening hours. It was probably the most popular late-night one, for people going from the hospital. I am sure I am not the only person—in this chamber, even—who has stopped in at Wanniasa on their way home from Canberra Hospital at night. I have spoken to Elise and the team there, and the changes to the Coles opening hours were part of the reason that they decided to shrink their hours. While that is disappointing, I can understand why that decision would be made.

Another issue is workforce. I know that, in health care, this is not just limited to pharmacy. Without enough pharmacists and pharmacy assistants, it can make it hard, with roster limitations, on pharmacy staff. There needs to be a minimum of 12 hours between shifts, and I am very supportive of that. I think everyone knows that I am very supportive of employee entitlements, and making sure they are followed and that people are looked after at work. That 12-hour shift break means that, when businesses are planning opening hours, they need to make sure they have a backup, if someone is sick the next morning, if someone has worked within the preceding 12 hours. It is just another factor to be considered.

I have also heard anecdotally that a lot like to open for 12 hours because it just rolls off the tongue. “We’re open 7 to 7,” or “8.30 to 8.30.” They think it is easy for people to remember. Anecdotally, I have also heard that, because pharmacy students study at the University of Canberra, many of them live on the north side in order to study, they get experience on the north side while studying and they choose to take jobs on the north side because that is where they are already set up. I do not know how true that is, but it is something that has been passed on to me—the idea that some pharmacists in the south have said that it can be harder to get pharmacy students and pharmacists. I do not know whether that is the case. Hopefully, that is not the case, because many of us in this place would agree that the south side is the best place to live. But you never know.

Going back to some of the issues, I know different states have tried different models over the years to encourage late-night pharmacies or all-night pharmacies, and some have been more successful than others. That gives the government a basis on which to look at what might or might not work, when working with pharmacies to make this happen. I have had it raised with me that there is a pharmacy at Canberra Hospital, and it could be used as a late-night pharmacy, because a lot of people are coming from the hospital or the after-hours GP there. That could be an option that works. I am not fussy about who the pharmacist is or exactly where they are located on the south side. Obviously, I would prefer it to be in Tuggeranong, but there is nothing on the south side, so it should be somewhere on the south side. If that is the option that works, then that is the option that works. I would like to see a more equitable distribution of access at night.

I want to thank the pharmacists on the north side who are opening until 10 pm or later and providing that service to their community. I know there are people who drive there from the south side. I have spoken to a few people in the last week, after having this idea, who have mentioned trudging to O’Connor and Belco to get assistance late at night. This motion is in no way trying to take anything away from them, except maybe the few customers who might want to go somewhere closer to home. I recognise that they are providing an important community service.

I want to thank all the people I have spoken to about this idea. The question that I keep getting asked, and that I keep asking myself, is: why don’t we have a late-night pharmacy on the south side?

I appreciate in advance what will be, hopefully, everyone’s support for this motion, in recognising that pharmacy is an important part of health care. If your child has a cough at night and you know that they need some kind of attention, that it is not a matter that requires sitting in a walk-in centre, but they need something, a pharmacist can be there. If you have run out of vital medication like insulin or epilepsy medication, there is someone there that can help you, before you go to bed. It is another piece in the big jigsaw that is healthcare provision.

I thank everyone in advance. I will make some more remarks when I close the debate. I commend my motion to the Assembly.

MR PARTON (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (3.19): Community pharmacy is a vital part of our healthcare system and, as such, we applaud Ms Tough for bringing this motion to the chamber today. It is often the first place that people turn, not just for

prescriptions but also for advice and help in managing everyday health concerns. Importantly, it is one of the most accessible parts of that system and I think that shines through in this motion. It is at the centre of this motion and it certainly formed the centrepiece of Ms Tough's speech. The motion rightly highlights a gap in access to late-night pharmacy services on Canberra's southside.

But I think it is important that we approach this issue with a clear understanding of the realities facing pharmacy operators. Through engagement with key stakeholders and local operators, it is clear—and I know Ms Tough has had the same feedback—that there is indeed a willingness to extend opening hours. It is what they would love to do in a perfect world—but the world is far from perfect. Pharmacies on the southside want to be a part of the solution. The barrier is not lack of intent; it is the practical challenges that come with operating late into the night.

One of the most significant of those challenges is security. Late-night trading can expose pharmacy staff to anti-social behaviour, theft and safety risks. Unlike larger facilities, individual pharmacies are often left to manage these risks on their own. It is tough enough for larger facilities. The toughest job in this town is definitely opposition leader, but the second-toughest job is doing security at a shopping centre, because it is crazy. For many pharmacies, that means employing private security—an option that is simply too expensive to sustain.

Further, the additional staffing costs associated with extended operating hours also need to be considered in what is one of the most expensive jurisdictions to do business anywhere in the country. We cannot reasonably expect small healthcare providers to shoulder these burdens alone. This is where government has a role to play. We are all looking for the same outcome here, aren't we? The government has a role to play. If we recognise, as we have recognised very clearly in this chamber today, that late-night pharmacies provide a public benefit—and they clearly do—then it is appropriate for government to explore how we can support their operation. That may include partnerships, targeted incentives or support for security measures that make extended hours safe and viable.

It is also important to acknowledge that southside residents are not without after-hours care. Have I mentioned the nurse-led walk-in centres? We love the nurse-led walk-in centres. They provide service and they operate until 10.00 pm. The Canberra Liberals believe that they play a valuable role in treating minor illness and injury, and they should absolutely be part of the broader conversation. However, they are not a substitute for community pharmacy. It is radically different. They do not provide the same access to medications, obviously, nor the same convenience for advice—though, it is almost the same convenience, to be honest—and over-the-counter treatments. This is not about choosing one service over another; it is about ensuring that our system works together to meet people's needs, particularly after hours. Ultimately, this motion is about fairness. I think you would agree, Ms Tough? Yes; she is with me. It is about ensuring that where you live in Canberra does not determine your ability to access basic healthcare services late at night.

We know there is interest from operators. We know there is community need. What remains is for government to work constructively with the sector to remove the barriers that are standing in the way. For those reasons, I support the motion, and I call to explore

practical partnerships to expand late-night pharmacy access on the southside.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (3.24): I rise to support the motion calling on the government to work with pharmacies to address the absence of a late-night pharmacy on Canberra's southside, which I think includes not only Tuggeranong but also Woden, Weston Creek and Molonglo. I thank Ms Tough's staff member for compiling data on pharmacy closing hours across Canberra, which clearly demonstrates a significant gap in after-hours services on the southside. It was a very impressive spreadsheet. That is how I know that it crosses all districts on the southside.

Pharmacies play a vital role in healthcare delivery and, as has been noted, equitable access. It is essential for timely access to medicines and advice and for easing pressure on our hospitals and GPs. Community pharmacies are often the first point of care, and their availability out of hours can prevent unnecessary emergency department visits. Many residents require urgent access to a pharmacy outside of standard hours, particularly those working long or irregular shifts, families with sick children or people managing chronic conditions. Whether it is dispensing urgent prescriptions, providing vaccinations or supporting ongoing care, southside residents deserve the same access to others across Canberra. For these reasons, I strongly support the motion.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS (Brindabella) (3.25): I would like to thank Ms Tough for bringing this motion today. I also thank Ms Carrick and Mr Parton for their contributions. When I first saw it on the notice paper, my reaction was pretty simple: this is a brilliant idea; it is a top motion. And the timing could not be better, because Thank Your Pharmacist Day is this Thursday.

Pharmacies are the backbone of keeping our local communities healthy. They do not just dispense scripts; they step up every single day to meet the growing demands on our healthcare system. Whether it is acute illnesses, vaccinations, medicine safety in aged care, helping patients manage chronic conditions or providing really useful and quick prompt advice, pharmacists are increasingly critical members of the healthcare team, and they do not always get the recognition they deserve.

The crux of this motion is straightforward: let's look at what we can do to get southside pharmacies open until 10.00 pm or later. I am biased, but there is a good reason this motion is focused on the southside—because, if you live in northern or central Canberra, there is access to late-night pharmacies. As Ms Tough mentioned, there are at least four pharmacies open every day of the week until at least 10.00 pm on the northside. Southsiders deserve and need the same, particularly those living in southern Tuggeranong. The Lanyon Valley is the furthest community from existing pharmacies that stay open until late.

I think this motion is the sensible starting point for the ACT, because what we are really after here is a sustainable model of care. Nobody wants a situation where a pharmacy is fully staffed at 3.00 am and three people walk through the door across the whole night looking for a packet of Band-Aids. That is not good for pharmacists, it is not good for business viability and, ultimately, it is not good for the communities they are trying to serve. Having late-night pharmacies open until 10.00 pm, as this motion seeks, is the right first step.

I could talk all day about the broad healthcare benefits of extending pharmacy hours, but I would be selling the motion short if I did not make it a little personal. I am a diabetic. I have had moments when I have run out of insulin—they have all being my fault—and I have had no choice but to drive into the city to access a late-night pharmacy. I did the drive. I made the trip and got the insulin I needed. It was better than going to emergency and being very, very apologetic. But realising at 9.30 at night that you are completely out of insulin is a problem. By the time you have grabbed your keys and driven in, the pharmacy on the southside would already be locked up. If one were closer, it is much more feasible.

I have three children. Anyone with kids knows that 9.00 pm on a random weekday is an emergency—and it can turn into a pharmacy emergency faster than you would think. Whether it is a fever, an ear infection, asthma or something you just cannot wait until the morning for—because your spacer has broken—families need access, and they need it when it actually suits family life. Keeping pharmacies open later not only is for convenience but also directly takes pressure off our emergency departments and walk-in centres. Every person who can pick up their prescription or get advice or service from a pharmacist later in the evening is one less presentation to a healthcare system facing record levels of demand.

I look forward to seeing what the minister brings back to us by the end of February. I genuinely hope that what comes back reflects the real need that exists for my neighbours and myself on the southside. I thank Caitlin Tough for bringing this motion to the Assembly.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (3.29): I rise in support of Ms Tough's motion. I thank Ms Tough for bringing forward her motion, highlighting the critical role that community pharmacies play in providing vital primary health care in the ACT and, indeed, around Australia.

As well as prescribing medicines and providing access to specialist products like specialist infant formula, pharmacists often provide advice for people with health concerns. That might include referring people to other services when needed, including GPs, walk-in centres and emergency departments when severity necessitates immediate review. Pharmacists are highly trained and are becoming even more so with the expansion of scope of practice for community pharmacists.

Some pharmacies that are open extended hours on the south side include Wanniasa, which closes at 8.30 pm seven days a week, and Pharmacy 4 Less in Tuggeranong, which closes at 9 pm Monday to Friday. But there is clearly a discrepancy between the south and the north, with more late-night services available on the north side, including to 11 pm in O'Connor and Civic and other late-night closing options in parts of Belconnen. I have to say that I have relatively recently gone to the pharmacy in O'Connor after 10 pm to access medication after a trip to a walk-in centre, and it was extremely convenient to have that so close to home.

While a small number of medications may be available from your healthcare provider, such as a walk-in centre, if you are currently living on the southside, it is a long drive to access services after a late-night trip to the walk-in centre or ED to access an

emergency prescription and get started on your course of treatment, or if you need pain medications at night or, as Mr Werner-Gibbings talked about, insulin or an asthma medication. It may simply not be possible to make it to a south-side pharmacy before they close.

Of course, as Mr Parton and others have said, pharmacies are small businesses. They need to ensure their opening hours are safe and sustainable. As an example of the challenges that pharmacists face and a demonstration of this, the Victorian government invested in Supercare Pharmacies to reduce pressure on hospital pharmacies and provide 24-hour services in 2016. However, following the cessation of funding in 2024, none of the 20 original pharmacies operated 24 hours a day. I understand that they all reverted to their previously commercially determined opening hours.

This highlights that community pharmacies determine their opening hours based on a range of factors, including community need but also the availability of pharmacists to work evening shifts. Ms Tough's anecdotal advice about pharmacy students is really interesting in that regard. There are the overtime rates that need to be paid, financial viability and the potential need for security staff, which Mr Parton touched on as well, particularly if the pharmacy is in an isolated setting where nothing else is open late at night.

Additionally, each pharmacy determines the services they provide based on the scope of practice of the individual pharmacist who is working, community need, and the viability of providing the service. As a result, pharmacies may not be able to provide a full range of services after hours, and that may also influence the decisions that they make about opening hours. They may have to provide communication to patients that they will be able to offer services during some hours and not during all of the hours that they are open.

I also note that, as with many allied health professions, there is a shortage of pharmacists in the workforce post COVID, and this has been part of the discussion through the Health Workforce Taskforce, which reports to health ministers, as well as among community pharmacists themselves. As health minister, I engage regularly with both the ACT Branch of the Pharmacy Guild of Australia and the ACT Branch of the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia. I really value my meetings and conversations with hardworking community pharmacists to understand the challenges they face on the ground. I will continue engagement with these important pharmacy leadership bodies, including on options to explore opportunities on the south side of Canberra to expand opening hours.

I have enjoyed an enduring partnership with these organisations, bringing forward key reforms to expanded scope of practice and access to vaccines in pharmacies. Most recently, I announced that new pharmacist vaccination standards will be in place this month to enable pharmacists to vaccinate children aged two and above ahead of winter. We remain committed to an expanded scope of practice that includes, most recently, treating minor skin conditions. Any pharmacist who has completed the required training and has a fully enclosed consultation room can provide treatments for the management of impetigo, herpes zoster, mild to moderate atopic dermatitis and mild plaque psoriasis, without needing the pharmacy owner to apply for a licence to do so. And, following reforms made last year, community pharmacy owners no longer need to apply for a

Medicines, Poisons and Therapeutic Goods “Other” Licence to provide services for urinary tract infection and oral contraceptive pill resupply, with at least 37 community pharmacies providing these services.

In addition to the expanded scope of practice already in place, we are also working towards expanding scope for mild, acute musculoskeletal pain, gastro-oesophageal reflux disease, allergic and non-allergic rhinitis, acne, and acute nausea and vomiting—the latter being something I know the ACT Chief Pharmacist is very pleased and very keen to deliver, because it is something that pharmacists see regularly with patients and they are limited in their scope of ability to help them, even though they know that they could do so.

However, most relevant to this debate on after-hours care is the fact that we are currently taking steps to improve access to pharmacy services for palliative care. Applications for the Palliative Medicines in Community Pharmacy Project Grant have recently closed. The program will provide \$922,000 to design and deliver an after-hours palliative care medicine service in the ACT. The successful provider will be finalised soon, with the service due to be up and running next financial year. This service will work closely with pharmacies, GPs and other health providers and will enable pharmacists to access training, peer support and capability development in providing palliative care medicines, which is a complex area of practice.

The initiative will assist pharmacies through extended operating hours, delivery, stocking and storage options. The grant will support Canberrans who are receiving palliative care at home to access palliative medicines after hours. This can make a significant difference to people who are nearing end of life and require urgent access to medication when their symptoms rapidly change. Clearly, this will not provide the full scope of pharmacy services late at night across Canberra, but it may help to incentivise some pharmacists on the south side, if they are working in this space, to be more viable in terms of extending their opening hours more broadly.

I note that the ACT government is stepping into the space of palliative care medicines after hours after the Capital Health Network set up the program and then ceased funding it. It is not the first time this has happened. So it is important that we not only work directly with pharmacies but also work directly with the commonwealth government and the Capital Health Network to ensure that our whole-of-system response is sustainable.

I again thank Ms Tough for bringing this matter to the attention of the Assembly. I look forward to working in partnership with our important community pharmacy sector on these issues. In the context of Thank Your Pharmacist Day coming up on Thursday, as Mr Werner-Gibbings mentioned, I thank the pharmacists who work so hard right across the ACT and particularly thank those who provide my own medications. I give a shout-out to TerryWhite Chemmart Compounding Ainslie, which makes my cat’s life a bit easier by making up her medication as well. I commend the motion to the Assembly.

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (3.39): I also thank Ms Tough for her motion. Honestly, her comment on yucky iron tablets struck a chord. I just picked up some more in anticipation of my GP scolding me, but I am not happy about it. I would, though, on Thank Your Pharmacist Day coming up this week, like to thank pharmacists for their

patience with the rest of us.

The ACT Greens support this motion. We think supporting it is a bit of a no-brainer because healthcare access should not depend on which side of the lake you live on. This motion highlights a fundamental inequity in our city. While north-side residents have multiple pharmacies open until midnight, south-side residents face a healthcare desert after 9 pm on weeknights and 7 pm on weekends. This is not just inconvenient at times; it is also a health equity issue that affects our most vulnerable community members. Late-night pharmacies are not just about dispensing prescriptions. I think this has been well covered in the debate so far, but I think it is important to say it again. They are also vital hubs for preventative care, vaccinations, urgent health advice, and managing chronic conditions when other services are closed. For shift workers, parents with sick children, people with disabilities, and those without transport, these pharmacies might be the only healthcare option available after-hours other than the emergency department.

The ACT Greens believe that health care should be accessible to everyone, regardless of their postcode. The north-south divide in Canberra should not determine access to health services. Late-night pharmacies in Woden and Tuggeranong operated successfully until recently, and that shows that this is possible. We just need it restored.

Having chatted with pharmacists and pharmacy owners—and I am particularly grateful to Elise and Erin from Capital Chemist Wanniasa for the time they spent giving us background—what we are hearing is that the safety of workers has been one of the main reasons for earlier closures. When a pharmacy closes late and it is the only store packing up, workers can often feel unsafe because there is not much passive surveillance or visible security. My understanding—and Mr Parton mentioned this earlier in his speech—is that, on the north side, there are pharmacies that have accommodated that by sourcing their own security, which is a costly endeavour, I understand. I would be eager to hear how the government respond to these challenges and what they might be able to do to ensure people feel safe leaving work at night. I cannot help but wonder if there might be some synergy in the government's Gender Sensitive Urban Design Guidelines, in terms of women's safety at night. It might be something to keep in mind.

I hear there are also challenges with rostering when pharmacies have had to open for more than 12 hours straight, as Ms Tough mentioned before, and there are pros and cons for stores that have their own access points into a centre, as opposed to those that are fully internal to a centre and therefore are locked into a centre's opening and closing hours.

What we know from all this is that the solutions that work best are often the ones developed in close consultation with the people they are designed to help—pharmacists and the people that rely on them—so we commend Ms Tough and the government's commitment to explore partnerships with pharmacies to expand hours, and we hope that they engage with community pharmacists to find sustainable solutions that maintain quality care while extending access to everyone. This is not just about convenience; it is also about fairness. Our community deserves equitable access to health care and the ACT Greens will continue to fight for this fundamental right for all Canberrans.

MS TOUGH (Brindabella) (3.42), in reply: I start by thanking everyone for their

contribution to this debate and for supporting my motion without any amendments. Thank you, everyone. I thank my office for pulling together the research to support this motion. From taking the anecdotal evidence we were hearing from constituents and me that there is no late-night pharmacy in Tuggeranong, to pulling together a fantastic spreadsheet of all south-side pharmacies and finding none there, and to then expanding that spreadsheet to cover all pharmacies and finding a few on the north side, it was quite the fun journey last week. I thank Georgie, who was only in her first week in my office last week, and Grace, on her second day as my intern, for their research work and for the fun afternoon they had last week, putting this all together. I agree with Ms Carrick that it is an incredible spreadsheet and thank her for her support of this motion. It is not just about Tuggeranong; it is also about all of the south side. That covers a fair bit of the current population and it will grow into the future.

I thank my colleague Mr Werner-Gibbins for his support and for sharing his stories about running out of insulin at 9.30 at night and needing more and kids breaking an asthma spacer and needing to replace it, with the only options being travelling to the north side or going to the emergency department. I thank Minister Stephen-Smith and her office for their assistance on this and appreciating the lack of healthcare accessibility for south-siders late at night, and for the minister's contributions about the experiences of community pharmacies in other jurisdictions, noting they are generally all small businesses and that there are many factors that they take into consideration around opening hours. The expanded scope of practice at pharmacies is another piece of that healthcare jigsaw puzzle and is helping so many in our community to access health care closer to home. I also welcome her initial thoughts on how government might be able to work with pharmacies to make this happen on the south side in the future.

I want to touch on Mr Parton's contribution—and welcome him back to the chamber, just in time for me to do so—and acknowledge the risk that late-night pharmacies and late-night retailers have, particularly regarding security. I worked in two 24-hour Kmart's as a teenager in my 20s and I can share with everyone that it was an eye-opening experience. I have seen what happens late at night in fairly empty shopping centres, both here in Canberra and on the Central Coast, both in the shopping centre and the car park outside. Even when the shopping centre is providing security inside, there are people in the car parks and there is no security around for them. I have seen things from theft all the way through to assaults. I was aware of a stabbing that occurred in the car park at one of the Kmart's I worked at, because of people being around at odd hours. So I agree that security is a major concern. There is a cost to be open. There are pharmacies on the north side that are covering that cost themselves and there are some on the south side that are able to use the fact that there are other, bigger shops open and have that security cost covered. Like Mr Parton, I agree this motion is about fairness. It is about equitable access to health care across our city and making sure people have treatment that they need where they are.

I thank Miss Nuttall for her support of my motion as well and the discussions we had in her office yesterday afternoon around pharmacies in Tuggeranong being inside shopping centres and outside shopping centres, and how that works. And I thank the Pharmacy Guild and Elise from Capital Chemist Wanniasa—who Miss Nuttall also mentioned—for her time yesterday afternoon after I put this on the notice paper. I reached out to the Pharmacy Guild and was then put onto Elise. We had a really great

chat about the experience of Capital Chemist Wanniasa and how they were open late at night and how they are now not, and some of the things that have changed there. I was able to put some of the stories I have heard from constituents and my own thoughts to them and have them confirmed, and then had some more reasons and thoughts on why they are not open late—even though some want to be open late, and some were open late and things have changed, why they are not doing that at the moment.

Finally, although I will probably do a 90-second statement or an adjournment later in the week on Thank Your Pharmacist Day, I acknowledge that it is this week and so acknowledge all the wonderful work that our community pharmacists do in providing us access to health care. I commend my motion.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Fuel security—impact on cost of living

MR PARTON (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (3.47): I move:

That this Assembly:

- (1) notes:
 - (a) the rising cost and growing supply issues surrounding petrol and diesel as a consequence of the war in the Middle East;
 - (b) that diesel is selling for over \$3 a litre in the ACT and Unleaded 91 is retailing for above \$2.40;
 - (c) that according to data from the Australian Institute of Petroleum, Australia has seen the sharpest rise in fuel prices in the developed world since the start of the Iran War;
 - (d) that the federal fuel excise is sitting at 52.6 cents a litre and makes up around 20 percent of the cost of a tank of petrol; and
 - (e) ACT Labor has long claimed that their working relationship with the Albanese Government is much more collaborative than was the case with the previous government;
- (2) further notes that:
 - (a) Canberrans are experiencing an unprecedented cost of living crisis;
 - (b) since the start of March, the average price of petrol and diesel across the Territory has risen by 28 percent and 44 percent respectively, meaning Canberra motorists have paid an additional \$10-\$15 million to refuel;
 - (c) in 2024, the Queensland Government introduced 50-cent fares across the entirety of the state's public transport network as a tangible cost of living measure; and
 - (d) increasing public transport ridership will assist in reducing congestion on Canberra roads;
- (3) calls on all party leaders and independent Members to write to the Prime Minister and strongly urge him to temporarily reduce the level of federal petrol excise as a cost of living measure during the Middle East crisis; and
- (4) calls on the Government to:

- (a) by 6 April 2026, or as soon as practicable, implement a trial of 50-cent fares across the Transport Canberra network until 30 June 2026 to incentivise public transport use to ease congestion; and
- (b) report back to the Assembly with monthly usage data for the period of the trial.

Canberra and the rest of country is facing a cost-of-living crisis. It has been going on for some time and it was recently exacerbated, of course, by another interest rate rise. It is related to many things. It is related to the tail of COVID, albeit that that was now nearly five years ago, but the correction in so many things is taking an eternity to land back in the middle. It is reaching another spike now, and I am not sure that we are at the height of that spike. It is going to be a bit savage. It causes enormous pain for thousands of individuals through no fault of their own. They are not responsible for this.

The rapid increase in the price of petrol and diesel has caused an immediate impact on the weekly bottom line of just about every household in Canberra, and we need to offer support. We need to, in whatever way we can—and we do not have many ways that we can—offer a cushion to blunt the trauma of this crisis, which we hope is short-term. The people are screaming and we must, as elected members, listen to them. The recent South Australian election results should hammer home to all of us that many sensible Australians do not feel that they are being listened to by elected members.

We now see diesel selling for over \$3 a litre in the ACT and we have petrol selling for over \$2.50. Interestingly, we in Australia have seen the sharpest rise in fuel prices in the developed world since the start of the conflict, and it is hurting. So we think it is timely to put pressure on the federal government to make changes, as does my colleague in Tasmania, the Premier of Tasmania, Mr Rockliff, and the opposition leader in Victoria.

Mr Barr, Ms Berry, and Mr Steel continue to come into this chamber and trumpet the amazing relationship that they have with the Albanese government, and we get told time and time again that they are now being listened to, as opposed to those evil conservatives. But, despite that chummy relationship, we just do not seem to get much for it. We are suggesting again today that, if you are so close to them, let's get some movement.

This motion calls upon all party members, or party leaders at least, and the independents to write to the Prime Minister urging him to reduce the federal fuel excise as a temporary measure to cushion this cost-of-living explosion. I have signed a letter to the Prime Minister that has not gone off yet. Would you believe, by chance, I have it in front of me now. Yes, I happen to have it here. It says:

Dear Prime Minister,

On behalf of my Canberra Liberals colleagues, I write to urge the commonwealth government to take immediate action on fuel excise as a practical and timely cost-of-living measure for Australian families. Households across Australia are already under sustained pressure from high grocery prices, rising insurance premiums, higher mortgage repayments and inflation restraint. Rising fuel prices are not a minor inconvenience. They hit family budgets hard, flow through the economy,

increasing costs for tradies, small businesses, freight, farming and essential services.

And community pharmacists. Community pharmacists are not really in the letter; I just thought I would throw that in there, Ms Tough. My letter continues:

For many Australians, particularly those living in outer metropolitan, regional and rural communities, fuel is an unavoidable weekly expense. Families must drive to work, take children to school, attend appointments and manage day-to-day life. When fuel prices rise sharply, the effect is immediate and challenging. I urge your government to consider an immediate reduction in fuel excise or a temporary suspension to provide direct relief to households and ease pressure across the economy.

Fuel excise relief would be simple and visible. It would reach people quickly and would particularly assist those who do not have the luxury of changing their transport habits or absorbing yet another increase in household costs. At a time when Australians are hurting and looking for practical leadership, this is an opportunity for the commonwealth to deliver much-needed relief. I therefore urge you to consider immediate action on fuel excise as part of the government's response to cost-of-living pressures.

Signed by me, the Leader of the Opposition in the ACT. So that is my letter to the Prime Minister. By leave, I present the following correspondence:

Fuel excise—Call for immediate action—Copy of a letter from the ACT Leader of the Opposition to the Prime Minister of Australia, dated 24 March 2026.

MR PARTON: As an additional measure to ease the cost-of-living pressure, particularly when it comes to transport, let's offer 50c fares and let's do it now—and let's do it until the end of the financial year. That is what the motion calls for. We are bleeding money anyway from the transport network because of this government's inability to (a) deliver a working ticketing system and (b) to actually collect fares anyway.

Let's use this crisis as a genuine opportunity to make a large-scale mode shift, albeit that there are no targets. We understand that there are no targets. We understand that there is a push to get people onto public transport, but we do not know how many, really, and we do not care. How much money have we spent on this in the last decade on this? We spent a lot of money. But, given that we have no targets, it is difficult to actually indicate whether we have succeeded or we have failed this. So let's use this genuine opportunity to make a large-scale mode shift and actually convince people who have never in their lives taken public transport to do just that, even though there is no target.

The 50c fares are going gangbusters in Queensland. So let's start a public transport revolution here. That is my view, Mr Braddock. Let's start a public transport revolution here, which, yes, will involve some cost but will hopefully get us to a period where we have more regular users of the public transport system—not that there is a target.

The government has spent billions of dollars on public transport in the last decade and has barely moved the dial with regard to per capita usage. This measure will not cost

billions—it will cost less than \$3 million between now and the end of the financial year—but may well achieve the aim of long-term mode shift for many Canberrans. So let's try it while the price of petrol and diesel is so high. I am just going to leave it there, so other people can speak. I commend this motion to the Assembly.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (3.55): I would like to thank Mr Parton for bringing forward this motion on the fuel crisis, although there have been, let's say, some interesting negotiations in the last 24 hours. This is an issue that is affecting households and businesses right here in Canberra. There is no question that the price of fuel is placing real and growing pressure on people's lives. Fuel prices and, in particular, price spikes not only impact the cost of the daily commute but also ripple through the entire economy. Fuel prices impact the cost of groceries and the cost of other goods and services, intensifying the cost-of-living pressures. The ACT government must look seriously at what practical steps are within our reach to help ease these cost-of-living pressures.

One of the most immediate and effective measures to reduce these costs is to get people out of their expensive fuel-guzzling cars and onto cheap, convenient and reliable public transport. That is something I share with the Leader of the Opposition: let's start the public transport revolution. Reducing the price of public transport fares has been a long-standing position of the Greens, and we are genuinely pleased to see this idea gaining traction on both sides of the aisle. That is a positive development. When we find common ground on cost-of-living relief, it gives us the opportunity to deliver real outcomes for the Canberra community. Cheaper public transport is not just about saving people's money; it also eases congestion on our roads, reduces the daily stress of commuting, reduces the cost of road maintenance and helps cut transport emissions—outcomes all Canberrans can agree they want to see.

I must take a moment to speak plainly about the cause of this crisis that we are experiencing. The Greens are a party of peace and non-violence. We are very proud of that history and of speaking out at important points in our history. So I must speak about this as well. The fuel crisis has been caused by the illegal and abhorrent actions of the United States and the State of Israel in starting this war on Iran. Australians do not want to be dragged into another war. We cannot bomb our way to peace. The Albanese Labor government must immediately withdraw Australian support for this illegal war. Pretending we are only conducting defensive operations is a convenient lie that has no basis in international law.

The fuel crisis that has directly arisen from this illegal war is not an abstract problem; it is being felt at kitchen tables across the territory. Making public transport more affordable is a practical, popular and forward-looking response. The Greens welcome the growing support for this approach of cheaper public transport, and we look forward to seeing this Assembly use this moment to deliver real cost-of-living relief for the people of Canberra. That said, there are some problems and challenges presented by the opposition's motion, which is why I would like to move the amendment circulated in my name.

I move:

Omit all words after paragraph (2)(d), substitute:

“(3) calls on the ACT Government to:

- (a) adopt free public transport for concession card holders as a form of cost-of-living relief for those who are in the greatest need;
- (b) seek federal funding to enable the provision of:
 - (i) free public transport for the duration of the fuel supply crisis;
 - (ii) 50-cent fares beyond the period of the crisis; and
 - (iii) an uplift in investment in public and active transport assets and infrastructure;
- (4) calls on all members, through their party leaders where relevant, to write to the Prime Minister to advocate for the implementation of a 25 percent tax on gas exports, to shift the cost burden for these reforms away from the average Australian and towards those profiting from this fuel supply shock.”.

MR BRADDOCK: The Greens support the opposition leader’s intent for coordinated advocacy on practical measures to support cost-of-living relief through public transport incentives, but we cannot support cutting the fuel excise as the mechanism by which we deliver that cost-of-living relief. While cutting excise can sound appealing on the surface, it is a blunt instrument that fails to deal with the underlying causes of the current fuel crisis.

The crisis is driven by global supply disruptions and Australia’s heavy reliance on imported fossil fuel. Reducing excise does not increase supply, nor reduce our reliance on fossil fuel. A reduction in the fuel excise will not secure fuel supplies for farmers who grow our food or for the trucking companies who move that food to our population centres. A reduction in excise will not guarantee fuel supply to our emergency services. In fact, any reduction in the fuel excise actually means more fuel will be burnt for non-essential purposes and less will be available for these essential functions. It is the law of supply and demand at work. While the cost of fuel is undoubtedly hurting household budgets, it is also sending a price signal. It is encouraging people to work from home, drive less and convert to zero-emissions vehicles. A strong price signal helps reduce demand in non-essential parts of our community while securing the remaining supply for our farmers, freight and other emergency services.

There is also no guarantee that excise cuts are fully passed on to consumers. Time and again, we have seen that temporary tax relief gets absorbed by capitalists and go into the profits of fuel companies, particularly in highly concentrated markets. That means a significant hit to public revenue with little certainty of lasting relief at the pump. The Greens absolutely have no desire to reward big corporations by delivering tax cuts, leaving less and less revenue to deliver real material cost-of-living relief. Ultimately, the Greens believe that commonwealth subsidies should be directed to public transport funding rather than excise reductions.

We also need to consider how the government can raise the revenue to fund those subsidies that we want and need. That is why the Australian Greens are advocating for a tax on gas exports, particularly of extraordinary windfall profits being made by those large gas corporations. We would like to invite the members of this Assembly to join that call. Australia is one of the world’s largest gas exporters, yet domestic users are exposed to high energy prices driven by the international markets. This is a clear market

failure here in Australia. A tax on gas exports would ensure that some of the biggest corporate winners of this global crisis are asked to pay for their fair share. These companies are benefiting from war-driven price spikes in global instability.

The government brings in less tax on gas profits than it does from the sale of beer. Capturing a portion of those windfall profits makes perfect sense from an economic standpoint. It also sends a clear signal that big corporations need to start paying their fair share, especially when their windfalls are being driven by debt, destruction and global stability. Unlike excise cuts, this approach does not hollow out our public finances and instead improves our ability to deal with this crisis. My amendment recognises the fuel crisis demands structural solutions, not short-term gestures. By rejecting ineffective excise cuts and backing a fair contribution from gas exporters points towards a response that is economically responsible, socially fair and aligned with our climate obligations.

We also need to recognise that the ACT government has its own capacity challenges. The Select Committee on Fiscal Sustainability of the ACT is working hard on recommending solutions to our fiscal imbalance. If the ACT government were fund 50c fares directly, my estimate is that it will cost the budget somewhere in the order of \$17.5 million per year in foregone revenue, which will create additional challenges over the economic cycle.

This challenge is why the Greens have been targeting our cost-of-living relief efforts on securing free travel for students, seniors and other concession card holders, who are the people most at risk from increases in the cost of living. The Greens estimate that the cost to the budget of this package would be a much more manageable \$4.3 million per year. At the same time, the Australian Greens are, precisely because of the challenges to state and territory budgets across Australia, calling on the commonwealth to fund states and territories in a way that enables 50c fares and, indeed, free public transport for the duration of this fuel supply crisis. My amendment invites the other members of this Assembly to join with us in advocating for that support in the interest of Canberrans.

The costs I have just identified are based on my office's analysis of the MyWay+ data ordered by the Assembly recently. So do not let anyone tell you that data is not useful. They are also premised on the status quo patronage levels. I want to recognise that, if lower fares are intended to incentivise more public transport uptake, more buses, drivers and depots will also be required.

I note that the transport minister said on radio that he is concerned that free or 50c bus fares will mean our buses will be full. The Greens see this as a good problem to have. We do not see it as a reason to avoid doing something that not only provides cost-of-living relief but also reduces congestion on our roads and the emissions that our territory generates. As was raised in question time earlier today, historic cabinet documents have revealed a longstanding and foreseen underinvestment in buses as would allow the ACT government to meet the mode share targets—which, I entirely agree with Mr Parton, are no longer a target—that it set out last decade. Those problems of historic underinvestment cannot be solved overnight, but it does need addressing. I can assure members that this will be a continuing discussion that the Greens will want to have as the budget comes down in June.

This motion, with my amendment, presents a clear opportunity for leadership from both the ACT Labor government and the whole of the Assembly. While there are limits to what this Assembly can control, there is significant value in advocating strongly to the federal government for measures that support practical, material cost-of-living relief. This is a moment to demonstrate what coordinated advocacy can achieve for our community.

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (4.05): Fuel is the lifeblood of a modern economy. Nothing functions without it, and our modern way of life, our standard of living, depends on it. It depends on petrol and diesel, and increases in the cost of fuel mean a higher cost of living. Everything that is transported has a link to the cost of fuel, from groceries on their way to the supermarket to the online order that lands on your doorstep, and even the materials that we use to build our homes with. Everything that is transported has a price factor that comes from the cost of fuel.

All of that is before we consider the direct cost that is borne by Canberrans every time they need to drive somewhere to do something—to drop the kids at school, to drive to the doctor or go to work. Every time we do anything in Canberra, essentially, we are bearing the cost of high fuel prices.

Small businesses and households are hit worst of all. Fuel is one of the single biggest expenses for Canberrans. We know—we are seeing it happen now—that, when fuel costs rise, they have to be borne, and other areas of consumption do suffer as a result. People tighten their belts, they stop spending, the cycle takes hold and the economy contracts.

In Canberra, where the private sector is already under pressure, price shocks resulting from a lack of fuel have the potential to deal a final blow to many struggling businesses. If they do not run their own fleet, you can guarantee that every business depends on a supply chain to get its goods. At the same time as spending drops, their income decreases. The margins go from slender to non-existent, and we run the risk of seeing more businesses close.

The commonwealth has acknowledged the impact of the fuel crisis. It has acknowledged, finally, that we are in a fuel crisis. The term “crisis” can be overused, but that is absolutely where we are today. It does not do any good to try and blame consumers for the state of our fuel supplies. Indeed, global factors have an influence, but it is absolutely incumbent on every government to respond to the situation that we face today.

I heard Mr Braddock criticising the proposal that Mr Parton has brought today—an absolutely practical proposal to get costs under control for Canberrans now. While Mr Braddock is talking about the underlying intention, the underlying drivers, what we are bringing is a practical solution to the cost-of-living pressures faced by Canberrans today.

We have to be somewhat sceptical about the intention of Mr Braddock’s amendment, because we know that it is not in any way about protecting the supply of gas reserves for Australia. We know that, because the Greens would very much like to ban the use

of gas, whether it be in Canberra or in Australia. We know that there is a bit of a straw man being developed around a range of issues that they are bringing up. For example, the cost of delivering the program of public transport incentives as an emergency response that Mr Parton has brought is definitely not in the region that Mr Braddock was discussing. It is closer to between \$2 million and \$3 million.

By comparison, we are talking about 0.45 per cent of the ACT's interest bill this year, or 0.011 per cent of the ACT's current debt. Mr Assistant Speaker, I am always concerned—my colleagues will tell you that I am always concerned—about any spending pressures on the ACT budget. At the same time, we have to make sure that we are looking after Canberrans who are already doing it tough. That is what making a saving for them from fuel excise would do.

Mr Braddock wonders whether that would work. We know that it will work because it has worked before. It has worked during COVID. The federal government, a Liberal federal government, cut the fuel excise, and it had a direct impact on the price of fuel at the bowser. That is how we know it will work. It has been done internationally as well. In Europe, you will see nations that are cutting their fuel taxes because it has a direct impact on the consumer. That is why we want to make sure we are bringing practical solutions—not dealing with underlying ideological objectives, but practical solutions to the everyday pressures that Canberrans face.

That is why I think it is absolutely imperative that the ACT does advocate wholeheartedly with the federal government to try and get fuel excise cut and does everything it can to get more people onto public transport. Those two measures combined, the interaction of a practical step for the ACT and a practical step from the commonwealth, would absolutely relieve the pressure that Canberrans face right now.

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (4.11): We are debating this motion at a time when households across the ACT are really struggling. The cost of groceries, rent, energy and transport is putting a lot of pressure on our households at the moment, including a lot of our people who are genuinely struggling just to get food on the table and meet the basics.

In moments like this, governments are expected to act—not recklessly, not ideologically, but sensibly, proportionately and in the public interest. It is fair to say that we are facing a crisis, but a fuel crisis and a cost-of-living crisis are not the only crises that we are facing. There is also a climate emergency happening right now. We need only look at the summer just gone. We have a new term this summer: whiplash summer. A whiplash summer is a good description of what we are experiencing on our planet at the moment. It is what comes after a crash, when you have lost control. It is a pretty violent image. I think it is what we have experienced, with the changes that we are seeing—deadly heatwaves, fires, floods, and vast tracts of Australia that are struggling with disasters at one point or another. Enormous patches of our country are now uninsurable. This is the climate crisis that we are living through now.

We do have a bit of luck in this, though. We are lucky, because some of the solutions to the climate crisis are the same solutions to some of the other problems—cost of living and the fuel crisis—that we have today, if we use these moments in time to make sensible choices for the people of Australia, rather than making old, ideological choices

for entrenched interests.

In September last year, I brought forward a motion to this Assembly calling on the ACT government to advocate for a tax on fossil fuel profits, including those profits generated through exports. It is really simple. Canberrans and Australians are doing it tough. We need big corporations and the fossil fuel industry to pay their fair share. This is what happens in other parts of the world, and it is overwhelmingly what the majority of Australians wish was happening here.

Back in September last year, the Labor and Liberal parties joined together to vote down any mention of taxing Australia's fossil fuels, taxing Australia's resources. Apparently, it was too contentious to even write to federal counterparts and ask them if they would consider it. That was an outrageous idea, only late last year.

During the debate, Labor amended away any mention of a fossil fuel tax. They did not speak as to why. They did not say why they opposed that. They just quietly cut it out. It looks like today, again, we are getting the same quiet amendment—a quiet disinclination to engage with a call for a fossil fuel tax.

I think the people of Canberra would like to hear a clearly stated reason on the record as to why we cannot tax fossil fuels and our resources, like so many other countries do, when we are struggling with so many rising costs, when households are struggling to meet their bills, when we have enormous amounts of climate damage to repair, and a health system that needs much better funding. I think that a lot of our citizens would love to hear that very simple explanation for why you cannot tax fossil fuel companies and billionaires. It is something that the majority of Australians have repeatedly said, in poll after poll, that they would like to do.

A few things in the world have changed since September 2025. Change is inevitable, in many ways, but it has always been the case that fossil fuel companies are benefiting from these global price shocks and from the geopolitical instability that we are going through. That crisis is being laid bare. With the high cost of petrol and the high cost-of-living crisis that is coming for us, we have lost six months of momentum. We have lost six months of pressure. We have lost six months of forgone revenue that we could have been asking for. But we can still act. It is clearly on the national table to talk about this, and I do not understand why we are not having an intelligent debate about it today.

There is no better time to start taxing Australia's fossil fuel resources than now. It would have been better a little while ago, but can we please start raising this revenue so that Australia can get the benefit of it?

A targeted levy on gas exports in the past has been framed as controversial, mostly by those who profit from the current system. Overwhelming evidence from recent polling shows that it is pragmatic, popular and supported by the majority of our people. The polling consistently shows strong community support for asking large fossil fuel companies to contribute more during periods of exceptional profit, especially when the revenue is so clearly earmarked for cost-of-living relief, for energy efficiency, for support for vulnerable households. That is because people understand fairness. Australians really do understand fairness. We understand shared responsibility and we understand the fact that, if people are digging up resources from our land, we should at

least get some of the benefits of that.

The September 2025 motion emphasised fairness. A fossil fuel tax is a fair tax because foreign-owned companies extract Australian resources. They export the resources overseas. They export most of the profits overseas, and they pay very little tax here in Australia. A fossil fuel tax is a fair tax because fossil fuel projects cause real harm to people and the planet. Australians are left with the clean-up bill, and those big corporations are walking away with the profits. We want them to kick a little bit of those profits back to us.

A fossil fuel tax is a fair tax because, just like taxes on cigarettes and alcohol, it discourages things that harm us, and it funds things that heal us. Crucially, advocating for a tax on gas exports is also about acting sensibly in a crisis. It is a smart, targeted measure that generates the revenue we need, and it is also broadly popular.

I cannot think of another point in Australia's history when there has been a tax that the people of Australia actually want. Taxes are wildly unpopular. To have a popular tax and to have major parties not even wanting to act in that moment and implement it is just baffling to me.

It funds relief in ways that align with our long-term economic and environmental goals, instead of cutting services or increasing debt, which are the only other two ways that we will get out of the problems we are in. It provides revenue certainty and reinforces the principle that those who benefit most from public resources should contribute appropriately to that. They should be contributing all the time, but they should particularly be contributing when they are causing harm and when times are really tough for the community around them.

No-one is suggesting that a single policy will solve the cost-of-living crisis, but refusing to consider sensible options because they are politically uncomfortable is not leadership. And it is politically uncomfortable for the political parties. Let us be really clear about this. It is not politically uncomfortable for the people who vote for you. The majority of the people who vote for you want to tax fossil fuels and have that revenue funnelled back into Australia to support the climate damage, the health system and the education system. That is what your people want. It is politically uncomfortable for the entrenched interests that you must be listening to, because you are not listening to the people voting for you right now.

Leadership is about weighing evidence. It is about listening to the community. It is about choosing fairness. Leadership is about doing something different, rather than simply doing things the way that you have always done them in the past.

The Greens are really disappointed to see a lack of leadership here in the Assembly today. We were equally disappointed last September, but we thought that, probably with the passage of time and because of the point at which events have moved on, we would get a different result today. It does not look like it.

The people of Canberra want to see practical and progressive leadership on these issues, and today was an opportunity to show that leadership. I am still hoping that we get a good explanation as to why we do not have that. That leadership could have brought

the ACT into the national conversation. There is so much support for this kind of sensible tax reform, and we could have been contributing to that. We could have been leading that. It is the kind of tax that other gas exporters, like Norway and Qatar, levy routinely, without controversy.

I am pleased to see the ACT once again leading the conversation on the solutions, but I am so disappointed that we could not get this apparently progressive Legislative Assembly on board to tax Australia's resources to pay for the problems that our community is experiencing.

MS BARRY (Ginninderra) (4.20): I too rise to support this motion. I thank the Leader of the Opposition for bringing this very timely motion forward, because it is clearly about what Canberrans are experiencing right now. There is no doubt in this space that our communities are facing immense pressure, and that we are listening. I will not sugarcoat it. We are facing unprecedented times, when you combine the facts that we had an interest rate rise last week and an interest rate rise two months prior and the current fuel shortage and supply issues. They are pinching. We are all feeling the pinch, even here in the Assembly. It is also leading to pressures at the bowsers. It is leading to pressures on household budgets. It is leading to disproportionate pressure on small to medium businesses. This is not abstract and it is not fear-mongering; it is reality.

As the Leader of the Opposition mentioned yesterday, the headlines announced that diesel prices have blasted past the \$3 mark in Canberra, while petrol prices continue to soar. I think all of us would agree that fuel should not be a luxury good and buying it should not be an exercise in discretionary spending. It is a fact that, for many Canberrans, having to fill their tanks is essential. They rely on it to commute to work, they rely on it to get their kids to school, and they rely on it to reach services that they need.

I sometimes hear debates around not funding services or infrastructure and that it encourages people to drive—improving and increasing reliance on public transport. But the reality is that a parent in Dunlop or Macgregor may have children in different schools that are often in different directions. I drive for 15 or 20 minutes in any direction, and before and after-school care does not align with bus timetables. Parent dropping off their children at 7.30 or picking them up after 5.30 deal with reduced services. And for many workers, particularly shift workers, public transport is not a viable option. In these cases, driving is not a preference; it is the only option.

So, while the minister last week encouraged Canberrans to consider alternative transport options amid fuel price hikes, this motion is not simply about begging Canberrans to do something different. It is about recognising that the problems require a more nuanced approach; it is about working with those who can make changes to their daily routines and assisting them to do that; it is about taking practical steps, as governments should, to get ahead of an issue before it becomes a completely unmanageable mess; it is about offering something to consumers to incentivise changes in their behaviour; and it is about realising the magnitude of this problem and providing practical solutions quickly. While some Canberrans prefer to use their private vehicles, they may also be willing to adapt their daily routines in the short term if the right approach is taken, which I am pleased to see that this motion goes to.

In January this year, the ACT government increased the price of peak-hour light rail fees to \$3.41, with off-peak fees sitting at \$2.70. This motion proposes a temporary flat-rate fare of 50c for a public transport service—not to only offer targeted relief for cost-of-living pressures but to also offer a sensible reason for many Canberrans to use transport whenever they can. As Liberals, we have an obligation to work constructively with Canberrans, so the solution is not to simply say people should drive less. This is not grounded in reality and it is not a viable option for many people.

We can encourage public transport where it works, but we cannot pretend that it works for everybody. This would show a fundamental misunderstanding of how Canberrans function, which is why I am pleased to see the two-pronged approach taken by this motion. By reducing the government excise for up to six months, which is what the motion calls for, we offer a sensible measure to lower costs to assist those who have no choice but to continue filling up their vehicles.

This brings me to the crux of the issue: we realise the Australian petroleum supply is finite and we know that there are many uses for fuel. It has been mentioned here a few times in different speeches. Global instability is disrupting the supply chain and fuel shipments to Australia are being diverted elsewhere. Costs will continue to go up and the foreign reserve will continue to shrink. We know the real risk that this creates. We know it will destabilise local and regional supply chains and we know that it would increase inflationary pressures. We also know the impact this will have on consumer behaviour. So to mitigate the havoc of panic buying, we need to anticipate these changes and take proactive steps.

This is about economic stability in the ACT and keeping money flowing through the economy. This motion offers measures and practical solutions, and acknowledges the multiple points of stress facing households, businesses and individuals. It is about addressing the immediate concerns and foreseeing what will avoid exacerbating the issues. This motion is about common sense and doing what we can to safeguard Canberrans against volatile global conditions we sometimes have no control over. I commend this motion to the Assembly and thank the Leader of the Opposition for bringing it forward.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (4.26): I thank Mr Parton and the Canberra Liberals for bringing forward this motion today and seeking action on what is a critical issue for our community and across our country. The severity of the current fuel crisis cannot be overstated. Dr Birol, the head of the International Energy Agency, described this crisis as greater than the two major oil shocks of the 1970s and the fallout of the Ukraine war combined. It was stated yesterday, I believe, that, at the time of the 1973 and 1979 crises, the world lost about five million barrels per day and that, as at yesterday, we are losing 11 million barrels per day.

While we hear claims that the war may be ended in 48 hours and that there have been productive talks, we have also heard from the other side that such talks never took place, and we have heard 48 hours may look more like five days. What is clear is that nothing is certain about this war and its geopolitical impacts, including the impact across Australia in relation to fuel. It is clear that these are unprecedented times, and we cannot deny that unprecedented times must, of course, be met with unprecedented action—real action that will meaningfully help our community weather this fuel crisis and bring us

together as a community to make sure that this finite resource remains available where it is most urgently needed: in the regions and fields of work like agriculture. That requires that we in the cities play our part to reduce consumption.

Because of the long-term inaction on encouraging more public and active transport uptake, the cost of this crisis will fall primarily onto many who are least able to deal with increasing fuel costs: those who cannot afford an EV; those who live further away from where they work and do not have access to safe, active travel infrastructure; those who live in the regions or in areas of Canberra without access to direct and convenient public transport options; and those with mobility challenges who do not have well-maintained footpaths to then connect to public transport options. These are some of the people who will be most heavily impacted by this crisis. It is on us as an Assembly and as a community to play our part to reduce the demand on fuel so that it remains available where it is most needed, while addressing barriers to community members making other transport choices.

I am encouraged to see everyone in this place interested in reducing non-essential fuel consumption by promoting public transport. Here's to a public transport revolution, as Mr Parton said! To reiterate Minister Steel's comments yesterday, there has "never been a better time" to consider alternative transport modes. This statement is backed by a range of data. Driving a typical petrol car costs around 20c per kilometre. Of course, it is more expensive now. Driving an EV that is charged via rooftop solar costs 2c per kilometre or 5c charged off the grid. But it has largely been wealthier Canberrans who have been able to access these savings, because we have not gone far enough or fast enough in supporting a just renewable energy transition.

Of course, I do not need to convince anyone of the savings that can be made through public transport usage as well. As at Q4 2025, the Transport Affordability Index found fuel was costing \$93.48 per week for the average Canberran—of course, that is before this crisis—compared with just \$33 for public transport. I think reducing the cost further is a great initiative and I am really pleased to see the Canberra Liberals' call for 50c fares for public transport. I very much welcome this. It provides Canberrans with a far less costly alternative. Similar measures introduced in Queensland in 2024 resulted in an 18.3 per cent jump in the number of people using public transport compared to 2023, showing that cheaper public transport does work to get people out of cars, into buses and onto rail. It saves our community money. Again, I thank Mr Parton and the Canberra Liberals for bringing this forward.

I also thank Mr Braddock for his amendments. I have to say that I too have concerns about the call to reduce the fuel excise. I acknowledge that many Canberrans are doing it tough, including at a petrol pump. It is something we have been speaking about. These pressures are felt across the territory by families struggling to make ends meet already, by small business owners who have also been grappling with higher operating costs and by tradies who rely on their vehicles every day, and by many others. I understand how frustrating this is for our community. It is important these concerns are acknowledged at both levels of government.

I am also the belief that cuts to the fuel excise will not have the intended impact. We need demand-side solutions. We are facing a fuel shortage exacerbated by panic buying. We need measures that reduce fuel consumption, not ones that reinforce our reliance

on fossil fuels. This is a band-aid. Yes, there is a temporary crisis, but this is a longer term problem. It is band-aid solution responding to volatility in fossil fuel prices. The response cannot be to encourage the use of more fossil fuels. It is about energy security, reducing demand through increased uptake of things like EVs, more convenient public transport and better active travel options. I am also concerned that a reduction in the fuel excise may not be passed on to consumers to the full extent at the bowser and may, in fact, harm national efforts to tame inflation and curb panic buying.

Our efforts are better spent elsewhere, supported by evidence. Commentary from across the political spectrum—the Centre for Independent Studies, the Grattan Institute and the Australia Institute—criticised coalition proposals to cut the fuel excise in 2022 and 2025. I acknowledge we are facing different circumstances now, but even the Centre for Independent Studies has noted that this is not the most effective way to provide relief. The Grattan Institute has highlighted that the most advantaged members of our community would disproportionately benefit from such a measure. They cited ABS data that found 43 per cent of petrol and diesel costs incurred at the household level are incurred by Australian households on the highest third of incomes, 32 per cent of petrol and diesel is bought by households with the middle third of incomes, and the households earning the lowest third of incomes account for 25 per cent of petrol and diesel expenditure. So this is the opposite of a progressive measure.

In times of crisis, we need leadership. In this crisis, we need coordinated, strategic and forward-looking government action focused on channelling the fuel to where it is most needed and reducing consumption wherever we can. This is something we can and need to do collectively, as a society and as a community. Cutting the fuel excise will not achieve that aim. That is clear. While it may be an appealing option, I understand that it is undeniably a populist move that does not reflect good leadership. As Mr Braddock's motion points to, another option has been put on the table, and that is taxing major multinational companies which are profiting from our resources and from this crisis. I would like to acknowledge the growing political momentum, especially at the federal level for this tax, courtesy of relentless campaigning from people like Senator David Pocock. The Australia Institute and the Greens, and now even One Nation, are on board.

Recent analysis from the Australia Institute indicates that we would now be \$63 billion richer if the federal government had implemented a 25 per cent gas export tax following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. In her remarks, Ms Clay spoke to fairness. What is fair is that we play our part in cities to reduce our fuel consumption to support the regions, because the regions support us, and that we raise revenue on our country's resources to support Australians through this larger cost-of-living crisis. To be clear, we have two options in front of us this afternoon: a fuel excess reduction or a 25 per cent tax on gas exports. I think the option proposed by Mr Braddock aligns with what Canberrans want now and for our future, which is why I will be supporting his amendment.

MR PARTON (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (4.35): I rise to speak to the various amendments. I thought it would have gone into one. Did I hear Mr Braddock correctly, Mr Assistant Speaker? I need to get the *Hansard*. I cannot wait for the *Hansard*. I am looking forward to the *Hansard*. Was Mr Braddock really talking up the benefits of high petrol and diesel prices? Is that what I heard Mr Braddock saying?

Mr Braddock: I was talking about economics.

MR PARTON: So Mr Braddock was genuinely standing in his chamber in a fuel crisis, and he was genuinely talking up the great benefits of high—

Mr Braddock: Point of order, Mr Assistant Speaker: I am being misrepresented by the Leader of the Opposition. I was not talking up their prices. I was describing the economic effects of supply and demand, which I recommend the Leader of the Opposition acquaint himself with if he is going to talk about such matters.

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Mr Parton, will you kindly rephrase.

MR PARTON: I can certainly rephrase and say that I look forward to reading the *Hansard*. I was going to call the police and report a bus hijacking earlier, because I have never seen a bus hijacking in this place before. But I had a motion before this chamber today calling for a cost-of-living relief measure, and yet there is a story in the *Canberra Times* which says that the crossbench is pushing to provide cost-of-living relief during the fuel crisis, and there are smiling pics of Mr Rattenbury, Mr Emerson and Senator Pocock. What is going on there? This motion was never about gas companies. This motion is about providing cost-of-living relief to people who are being impacted by the high price of petrol and diesel. In its original form, this motion has nothing to do with gas exports and taxing gas companies—and, certainly, if I have my way, it will not have anything to do with gas companies by the time we close the debate on it.

We cannot support the amendments from the Greens and the amendments that I have seen from Mr Emerson. Both the Greens and Mr Emerson are compromised in this space because they feel that they must support the position of their federal colleagues—that being the Greens Federal Party and Senator Pocock—who are on a crusade over gas companies. This motion has nothing to do with that. We could have moved a motion about gas exports in Ms Tough's motion, because Ms Tough's motion has about as much to do with gas exports as this one does. So we could have moved it in that. I am not saying that we would not be prepared to have a conversation about it, but I am not sure that we can just hijack this one and march on in there and bring this federal agenda to this motion.

There are some components of the push that I do not disagree with, but I refuse to have this motion hijacked to fulfil the wishes of federal representatives fighting an ideological battle that is not intrinsically linked to the core of this motion. The residents of Canberra will not believe now. They do not want to wait for some long and drawn out critical process regarding shifting money from gas companies.

Obviously, I have not reviewed the *Hansard*, but if anyone in this chamber at any point is pointing out the benefits of higher petrol and diesel prices, I am not sure that that lines up with the majority of Canberrans. We have had a suggestion in here that, if we wanted to support the majority of Canberrans, we would back these amendments. Indeed, if any member at any point ever suggests here that there is benefit in higher petrol and diesel prices because people stop driving cars, I do not believe that that position is shared by the majority of people in the suburbs. Most of the residents of Canberra—whether or not the Greens or Mr Emerson like it—still drive petrol and diesel-powered vehicles. That is what they drive. Although we understand the pain that

this gives the Greens and Mr Emerson, it is a fact of life.

The Canberra Liberals do not believe that internal combustion engines are evil. I can understand why the Greens do not want you driving your petrol or diesel-powered car, but the Canberra Liberals understand fully that it is actually a requirement for your life and you need petrol to be cheaper now. You do not need to be drawn into some ideological charged political debate in another chamber—and, if I have any say in it, I will not allow that to happen here today.

Just briefly, I have seen the amendment from Ms Carrick. It looks all right to me. I look forward to the amendment from Mr Steel.

Question put:

That the amendment be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 6

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

Noes 16

Andrew Barr
Chiaka Barry
Peter Cain
Leanne Castley
Tara Cheyne
Ed Cocks
Jeremy Hanson
James Milligan
Suzanne Orr
Mark Parton
Marisa Paterson
Michael Petterson
Chris Steel
Rachel Stephen-Smith
Caitlin Tough
Taimus Werner-Gibbings

Question resolved in the negative.

Amendment negatived.

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage and Minister for Transport) (4.46): I am very pleased to finally be able to speak in accordance with the rules of debate on this motion and I thank Mr Parton for bringing it forward. Rising costs of living are a challenge for our whole community, and especially for those most in need. Addressing costs of living to ensure that Canberra is liveable for everyone is a core Labor value.

While the parties in this chamber may not agree on the best way to respond, we all agree that oil price shocks are a serious issue. Today's debate is fundamentally one about the best way to address that challenge. Whether it is to get to work, to school, to reach services or to enjoy the amenity Canberra has to offer, Canberrans need access to safe, reliable and affordable transportation. As an immediate response, the ACT government has supported inspection and regulation to prevent price gouging, and we are continuing to work closely with the commonwealth government on the range of measures they are undertaking to increase penalties for this conduct. We will continue to advocate for national action, including by writing to the Prime Minister following this motion.

Critically, we will continue to make the strategic long-term investments in our public transport network to make sure that we have low-cost public transport options which are convenient, reliable and accessible to more Canberrans. Our government has deliberately been keeping public transport fares low to make sure that vulnerable users can be supported to use public transport and to alleviate cost pressures on all public transport users. It is why our government froze public transport fares for five years. It was a clear demonstration of a cost-of-living measure to support our community that continues to make sure that our public transport fares remain low. While they were indexed from January 2025, that was off a very low base with no retrospective application of indexation for those five years that they were frozen.

While cost is a factor in the equation when it comes to choosing whether to take the car, bus or light rail, the cost of fares and monthly caps are very competitive when compared to the cost of a tank of fuel—even more so as fuel prices continue to rise. There has never been a better time to take public transport in Canberra. It is an affordable option for Canberrans to take compared to using a private motor vehicle and having to deal with the rising costs of fuel. However, to be a credible alternative for Canberrans, our public transport needs to connect them with where they want to go—be it to work, to run errands, to attend appointments or other day-to-day travel. This takes investment in our services so they can continue to provide frequency, connections and a better alternative than taking the car.

Through our investment in light rail we now move 10,000 passengers per weekday through the corridor between Gungahlin and the city. Through our investment in the Woden bus depot we increased our capacity to grow our bus fleet and realised around 2,000 kilometres in savings from dead-running, which we were able to reinvest straight back into an improved bus network to deliver additional weekday services. Through our investment in growing our battery electric bus fleet we are providing more passengers with a comfortable, quiet and accessible trip while growing our own operational resilience against external factors like this fuel shock.

We also regularly review our fare settings to ensure that they remain balanced, appropriate and affordable for the demographics across our community. We believe that we must take an approach that is strategic, informed and balanced in terms of our investment in our public transport network. The ACT government's view is that our investment as a government must be focused on the frequency, capacity and reliability of our public transport services. Other measures could come at the cost of our existing services and our ability to increase services in the future in line with the commitments that we have made to the community.

Nonetheless, I would like to thank Mr Parton for bringing the motion today, particularly his suggestion around 50c fares. I have circulated an amendment which goes to a range of different matters and seeks to incorporate parts of Mr Parton's motion as well as other suggestions in motions brought forward to the Assembly, including by Mr Braddock. It includes concessions for concession card holders using public transport. It includes calls to write to the Prime Minister in relation to the fuel excise, as well as seeking federal funding for both free public transport or low-cost public transport initiatives and calling on them to continue to invest in public and active transport infrastructure, which is so critical to supporting the mode shift that we want to see in the ACT. It also provides a report back to the Assembly, calling on the ACT

government to provide an update on the fuel supply situation, which I know members are interested in. I think that is a useful thing for us to do to include in the motion.

While I have sought to try and incorporate many of the elements of the issues brought to the Assembly, I realise that, in a Tuesday special with many different amendments going around, we have not been able to necessarily get agreement on everything. But I think our motion tries to strike a balance and recognises the cost-of-living pressures that are faced by Canberrans, while also putting forward practical measures for implementation, including those that are contingent on commonwealth funding or action.

ACT Labor came to this term with a focus on practical, proven measures to keep the Canberra we love and make it even better and make it even more liveable. The fuel supply shock shows us just how important it is to continue the commitments we made, those long-term investments in a sustainable future—more buses and more bus services, more light rail, active travel connections and other measures like support to buy an EV. I am now the longest standing transport minister since self-government—I think I am the longest serving transport minister in the whole of the country at the moment—and I have had extensive engagement with public transport advocates like PTCBR over the years in relation to measures. One clear message that they have always said to me is that the thing that we need to do to support more people to use public transport is to invest in better services, and that is what the government will continue to do

I move:

Omit all words after paragraph (2)(d), substitute:

- “(3) calls on the ACT Government to consider the adoption of free public transport for concession card holders as a form of cost-of-living relief for those who are in the greatest need;
- (4) calls on all party leaders and independent Members to write to the Prime Minister to:
 - (a) strongly urge him to temporarily reduce the level of federal petrol excise as a cost-of-living measure during the fuel-supply crisis; and
 - (b) seek federal funding to enable the provision of:
 - (i) free public transport for the duration of the fuel-supply crisis;
 - (ii) 50-cent fares for the period beyond the crisis; and
 - (iii) an uplift in investment in public and active transport infrastructure;
- (5) calls on the ACT Government to provide a comprehensive update on the fuel supply situation and the impacts on the ACT to all members of the Legislative Assembly by Tuesday, 31 March.”.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (4.54): This motion recognises the very real cost-of-living pressures Canberrans are facing as fuel prices continue to skyrocket. One of the most practical ways to ease that pressure is to encourage people to shift to public transport, and reduced fares are clearly intended to do exactly that. But cheaper fares only work if there is enough capacity in the system to carry the people they attract. Last month, Transport Canberra went in the opposite direction—cutting rapid services,

including around 50 per cent of the northbound R4 and R5 services during the morning peak. As a result, commuters are being left behind at bus stops, watching full buses pass them by. We now have a clearer understanding of the traffic impacts associated with the Commonwealth Avenue bridgeworks, and it is obvious that these cuts were far too severe. They are already undermining confidence in public transport at the very moment we are asking more people to use it. The minister has said that timetable changes will not occur until the start of term 3, four months away. That is simply too slow for people who cannot get on full buses that drive past their bus stop every morning.

If we want people to use public transport, then we have to provide enough convenient services to attract people to it. That is why I will be moving an amendment, circulated in my name, that calls on the government to add sufficient bus services to meet current demand and the induced demand from reduced fares, including urgently restoring services that were cut last month, while bringing additional capacity online where it is clearly needed.

I support Mr Emerson's ambitious motion for dedicated bus lanes. We need bus lanes along the Cotter Road and the full length of the Woden to city corridor. We need separated cycle lanes. It is unbelievable that, after decades, we still do not have an adequate cycle path between Woden and the city, and the cycle path from Molonglo to the city cannot be left to the never-never. Without that commitment, cheaper fares risk becoming an empty promise. With it, we can deliver genuine cost-of-living relief and a public transport system that actually works for the people who rely on it.

I move:

In paragraph (3), insert:

“(b) add sufficient bus services to meet the demand induced from reduced fares;”.

MS ORR (Yerrabi—Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water, Minister for Disability, Carers and Community Services and Minister for Seniors and Veterans) (4.56): I am rising to speak to the final part of Mr Steel's amendment to the many amendments, which is calling on the government to provide a comprehensive update on the fuel supply situation and the impacts on the ACT to all members of the Legislative Assembly.

I am more than happy to support that. In what has been quite a wideranging and diverse debate, there is a lot of issues that I think go to a lot of things, not just the immediate pressing matters. It would probably help to have that grounded. It has been quite a fast-moving, developing situation to date, and providing information has quite often been a case of, “Provide it today and tomorrow it is already out of date.” But, certainly, there is a lot going on, and how Australian jurisdictions work together to address what is a national surge in demand and prices is paramount to addressing the issues that have been raised in the original motion and throughout the many subsequent amendments that we have seen flying around on the floor today.

I would just like to take a moment to run through some of the developments that we continue to see in how we are responding to this. This is a national situation. It is one

that we continue to work on across jurisdictions. Governments and industry are coordinating to maintain fuel supply and manage any emerging disruptions. Where we are seeing the impact, it is coming from a higher than usual purchasing of diesel and petrol, which is causing some localised shortages in some regions. So we are looking at steps we can take to stabilise supply.

Again, as I have said a few times now, and I will reiterate, we please urge Canberrans to maintain their usual purchasing practices. Where we are seeing pressures on diesel and petrol in the ACT, this is because the demand that we are seeing is being driven by precautionary buying rather than actual consumption. We do continue to maintain supply to Australia.

We will continue to work through planning for what we do if we do need to increase or if pressure is increased and we do need to have alternative options, but, again, I caution: please do not read this as that we will be standing up fuel restrictions tomorrow; that is not necessarily the case. We want to be calm but prepared should other situations eventuate.

The national cabinet has appointed a fuel supply coordinator. That coordinator is working across jurisdictions and with industry to coordinate the supply of fuel in Australia, given the pressures that we are seeing. National cabinet has met on this matter and energy ministers are also meeting and are supported by taskforces across the national and state and territory jurisdictions.

In the ACT, we have stood up an ACT fuel task response team, which is out monitoring and working with our local fuel providers and making sure that we are abreast of the situation in the ACT at any given time. I would also note that the ACCC has commenced an enforcement investigation into potential anti-competitive conduct at the national level. So we will continue to watch the supply, the pricing, and how we coordinate our issues in what is a rapidly evolving international situation. Again, how we all continue to work together and how we all continue to respond to the genuine pressures that are in the immediate situation will be key to making sure that the impacts of this are as minimal as possible.

Going to the ACT, I know there has been a bit of commentary; I have seen it on social media. My mum has very kindly provided me with updates of everything she is hearing on ACT noticeboard at any given moment. We are seeing shortages reported in the ACT. Again, these are very short in their duration. We are seeing stocks refilled, often within hours. I remind Canberrans: please maintain your normal fuel purchasing practices; please do not look to get additional fuel or to change your practices because you feel that there is about to be a shortage. That is actually the thing that is going to create pressure on our fuel supply right now.

I think I will leave my comments there. As I said, it is quite a rapidly evolving situation. We will continue to provide updates. I certainly support Minister Steel's amendment, particularly the part providing all members of the Legislative Assembly with a much more detailed update on matters so that we can focus on the immediate matters at hand.

I look forward to what I think will be many debates over the rest of the term as to other considerations of transport mode shift—active travel, climate change, cost of living and

everything else that has been aired in this debate today.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (5.02): Starting with Minister Steel's amendments, which include some elements from my amendments that we unfortunately did not pass, I am grateful to the minister for incorporating those elements and thank him for it.

Those amendments also take out our call for the 25 per cent tax of gas exports. Unfortunately, it appears like Labor got cold feet at the idea of taxing fossil fuels, even though a tax on gas exports is simple, sensible, and has widespread support across Canberra and, in fact, the country. It seems that the Labor government wants to give a free ride to those profiting immensely from this fuel crisis. He will not even call his federal colleagues and ask them to support an idea that they are themselves canvassing within the electorate. So I am disappointed to see that particular amendment get taken out.

I also want to talk to the fact that the amendment, in terms of reference to the adoption of free fares for concession card holders, has been downgraded to "consider". This is something I will continue to campaign for and that I would like to see this government pass as targeted cost-of-living relief for those Canberrans who are the most in need of it.

However, I also understand that Mr Steel's amendments do have the support of the majority of the house. I do just want to make a little point to Mr Parton. The Liberals support of Mr Steel's amendments means that the Liberals are the ones who are walking away from their own call for a trial of a 50c fare period. If only we had been able to spend more time being able to talk this issue through, we might have actually secured something in this space, and it is an unfortunate thing we have not been able to deliver for Canberrans today.

We are in a climate crisis. The fundamentals of economics say that if you want less of something you should tax it. If you want more of it, you should subsidise it. Therefore, if we are going to subsidise public transport, it is sensible to also tax fossil fuels. If you are not prepared to advocate for taxing fossil fuels, you are only doing half of the job, and you not being serious about the climate crisis that we are in.

I will just talk briefly to Ms Carrick's amendment, which we will be supportive of. It makes the point I was trying to communicate: if we have full buses as a result of increased demand from the subsidised public transport, of course we need to examine what investment we need to make into our bus fleet, the drivers and the support services to ensure that we have a bus service that is meeting the demands of Canberrans. This is not a terrible thing because it also means there will be less congestion, fewer emissions and less of household budgets being spent on transport. Ultimately, Canberrans would be the beneficiaries of this process. We will be also supportive of Ms Carrick's amendment.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (5.05): I just want to reflect briefly on this amendment—my remarks earlier spoke to my views on it more broadly—but also to some of the frustrations raised by the Leader of the Opposition regarding calls from Mr Braddock earlier to have change happen at the federal level. Mr Parton took exception to his

amendment on those grounds.

I note, though, with disappointment, as I understand this amendment before us now will be supported by the Canberra Liberals, just how much the calls in their original motion will be watered down by this amendment. And I would encourage them not to support it, in fact, on those grounds, or at least elements of it. It is disappointing that they are looking at supporting the amendment. Their original call was for the ACT government:

... by 6 April 2026, or as soon as practicable, implement a trial of 50-cent fares across the Transport Canberra network until 30 June 2026 to incentivise public transport use to ease congestion ...

Fantastic; great call-on!

Now that has been reduced to calling on all party leaders and Independent members to write to the Prime Minister about it. So the outcome of this will be letters from members of the Assembly to the Prime Minister—not to implement that policy but to seek federal funding to enable the provision of 50c fares for the period beyond the crisis. Yes, the free public transport for the duration of this fuel supply crisis, as Mr Braddock spoke about, has been included here, and that is positive, but we are calling on ourselves to write letters seeking federal funding to enable the provision of this measure! This is something we can act on this afternoon—Mr Parton has indicated he has already written such a letter, so we are one down—and we can come back and nothing will have changed. I like writing letters, but I think this is a really weak motion that we have ended on, and I think that is really disappointing, because I thought that the initiative that was brought forward by the Liberals in relation to public transport is a really good one. It is something that, as we have heard on ABC radio this morning, in fact, a lot of Canberrans support and were excited to see. I was one of them.

So if there are concerns and frustrations about the level of collaboration happening on the crossbench at both levels of government, Mr Parton could have joined in that collaboration. I think if he had done so, and if we had seen more collaboration across the Assembly, we could have got a better outcome with today's motion.

Instead, we will all be writing letters with no firm commitment to implement any measure—any measure—coming out of today's debate, which I think is really, really, disappointing. It is not what Canberrans expect of us in this place. It is not what Canberrans expect of them in that place up on the hill. People expect their politicians to advocate for and implement measures that will actually change their lives, not just talk about it.

Ms Carrick's amendment to **Mr Steel's** proposed amendment agreed to.

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

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (5.08): I seek leave to speak a second time and to move the amendment circulated in my name.

Leave granted.

MR EMERSON: I move:

- “(6) calls on the ACT Government to encourage increased public and active transport uptake, at least for the duration of the fuel supply crisis, including by:
- (c) trialling dedicated bus lanes on as many Rapid bus routes as possible;
 - (d) implementing pop-up separated cycle lanes on as many key traffic corridors as possible, such as Northbourne Avenue;
 - (e) seeking federal funding for these measures; and
 - (f) reporting back to the Assembly on the implementation of these measures in the next sitting week.”.

My amendments call for the government to establish separated bike lanes on as many key traffic corridors as possible, such as Northbourne Avenue, which has been under consideration, I believe, since at least 2018, and which has had various sections where one lane has been closed anyway because of construction works alongside Northbourne Avenue for many recent months. It is looking more open now, which is encouraging. I am also calling for a trial of dedicated bus lanes on as many rapid routes as possible, for the government to seek federal funding for these measures and for them to report back to the Assembly on the implementation of these bike and bus lanes.

On the provision of pop-up bike lanes—the unprecedented nature of the escalating fuel crisis that we are experiencing means that we should look to the learnings from similarly unprecedented crises for what we can do, like the COVID pandemic. During COVID over 100 European cities repurposed street space for bicycles, creating 2,000 kilometres of new bike lanes before June 2020.

Berlin was one of the first to implement these pop-up bike lanes. The innovation was simple. It involved painting the road with a bike lane, providing relevant signage and setting up temporary physical barriers. Importantly, when implemented, this innovation was not considered too hard and was something that could not be done quickly. Instead, these lanes were literally put up in 10 days or less. While these were temporary pop-up lanes, they show what is possible when we focus on getting the job done.

Following the success of this initiative, Dutch transport consultancy Mobycon published an 11-step guide on how to follow suit. It is called *Making Safe Cycling Spaces in 10 Days*. I would really encourage members to read the document. I am happy to provide a copy if you are curious about it. It shows what can be done when we get on with it, and I would encourage members in this place to focus our efforts on what can be done by us, rather than focusing on why a policy change simply cannot happen.

I also know research from the Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies identified what exactly is required to implement these kinds of reforms, like the ones done in Berlin, with such speed. Firstly, it is important that pop-up bike lanes are not a new concept. The ACT currently has its own pop-up bike lane along Bowen Drive; it is fantastic, so we can tick that one off. And we often have to establish temporary bike lanes due to construction projects throughout the city. This is something we can do; we do do it.

Secondly, they identified that the bike lanes implemented in Berlin were already

officially identified as key projects. We have an Active Travel Plan which outlines an entire connected system of cycling infrastructure, so we can tick that requirement off too.

Finally, the success in Berlin depended on administrative competence being paired with political will. As the government frequently points out, our public servants are hardworking experts within our system, within our government, who are capable of doing this work. But that leaves the final question: is the Assembly actually willing to do this? My understanding is that in the vote on this amendment—and I hope I am wrong—it is going to go down, which would suggest that the political will is not there.

I do not think we have heard yet a clear articulation for why that that will is missing. I am curious to hear contributions to the debate—to implement ambitious and cost-effective measures that will enable us to actually reduce our fuel reliance. Imagine people riding down Northbourne Avenue, making that choice over driving, and people stuck in their cars realising, “Actually, it would be easier to ride my bike.” This is the kind of thing we can do. We could do it tomorrow; we could do it in the coming week or fortnight.

Unprecedented times do call for unprecedented measures and given the volatility we have seen on a global scale, it is possible that these impacts will continue to affect Canberrans for many months. I, for one, do not have any confidence that conflict in the Middle East will stabilise any time soon. Active transport needs to be viable so our community can enjoy much-needed cost savings. Of course, there are health benefits as well. Pop-up bike lanes are one simple, easy way of doing this. If members are looking for a more local but perhaps less speedy or ambitious example, Sydney, which is a notoriously unfriendly city for cyclists, laid down almost seven kilometres of cycling infrastructure over six months at the end of 2020. Northbourne Avenue, for example, is 4.5 kilometres long. This is doable.

Of course, pop-up bike lanes are not an isolated measure that will have a sufficient impact, which is why my amendment also calls for trialling dedicated bus lanes and Rapid bus routes. Again, this will require some painting of lines and signage. As always, gas cost is an important factor when it comes to public transport usage—and, again, that was reflected on in earlier remarks tackling that issue in that respect—but we in this place know that convenience is the main barrier. This is the main thing that is raised with me by members of our community that is keeping them from switching to public transport, or active transport for that matter.

When they are looking down the barrel of a one-hour bus trip or an easy 20-minute drive or an unsafe bike trip, people will choose to drive if they can afford to do that, and they will do that even as the cost of fuel increases. As Mr Parton points out, most Canberrans drive petrol cars. So we need to tackle the relative inconvenience of public transport, and we can do that by introducing dedicated bus lanes for Rapid routes—tripling this idea with these routes. This solution is proven to reduce travel time, and I would think the Canberra Liberals would support this push, given the policies they took to the last election and the motion they have on the notice paper scheduled for Thursday, which I look forward to debating.

One study found the implementation of these kinds of bus lanes in Rome reduced travel

time by around 18 per cent. Decreased travel time also allows for more reliable services, rather than buses being stuck in traffic, and provides further incentive for people to catch the bus instead of driving. What we need is to create a situation where Canberrans sitting in cars stuck in traffic on the way to work in the morning, looking at the cost of fuel and being frustrated by it, see buses flying past in a Rapid bus lane and say, “I should really take the bus instead.” We can create that. We could do that. We could have Canberrans saying that to themselves, and we could achieve the outcome that Minister Steel is concerned about of having over two full buses. So I welcome Ms Carrick’s amendment and will support that amendment addressing this issue—saying that if demand increases, fantastic, let’s address it and increase the provision of services.

Given the obvious need for these proposed measures and the precedent set both internationally and interstate, I find it hard to believe the criticisms that this is too hard, too complex, or will take too long, are made in good faith. This is just a reluctance to act. It is an aversion to ambitious, meaningful change we could implement here in the ACT and should implement. Of course, this is not only a matter of the cost of what we can do now to address the crisis we are facing but also touches on other policy areas. Climate action is among them; it is something we have been speaking about.

Minister Steel’s foreword in the ACT government’s own Active Travel Plan also reflects this, and I think it is important to consider whether the amendment that has been moved by the minister that has been supported, and the impending opposition to this amendment, aligns with government policy. This is an important question we should ask. Minister Steel’s foreword in the ACT government’s own *Active Travel Plan* says:

The COVID-19 pandemic has also accelerated changes in how we work and study. We have seen fuel prices increase significantly due to global uncertainty presenting an opportunity to enhance low cost forms of transport. Emerging technology provides both new travel options and policy challenges. People got a taste for more walking and cycling, particularly within their local communities and we want to build on that.

We recognise that in the midst of this change, there is an important opportunity to support new transport habits that will last into the future, are good for our health and will strengthen community wellbeing.

I could not have said it better myself.

In closing, my amendments would contribute to the government’s own policy position under the ACT Active Travel Plan, and I presume its impending climate change strategy, although we will wait to see what that document will contain—we are yet to see what that document will contain. This is why I hope, as outlined in the original motion, there will be a more meaningful boost—or in one of the amendments on the back of this motion—to our active travel infrastructure. My amendment provides detail as to exactly how we can do that in a meaningful way to provide immediate relief. These improvements can and should be realised with the help of the commonwealth. We have a responsibility here to do everything possible to support the states and territories in navigating this crisis.

The spiralling fuel crisis our community is weathering does demand coordinated action.

I hoped to see the ACT government, the federal government and the entire Assembly step up to the challenge and actually act. I have sought to update my amendments throughout the day based on input from other members, including the Greens, whose amendment was voted down earlier and which overlapped with parts of the amendment I had prepared. I thank them for working with me and for us both having the opportunity to move our amendments. They also reflected concerns raised by the office of the minister for City Services about having firm commitments in this amendment to specific routes and timelines. I understand those concerns. This needs to be practical. It needs to be doable. This is why the wording I have used is around as many Rapid bus routes as possible and as many cycle lanes as possible on key transport corridors. With that in mind and given the intent of these amendments and the need for real action, not just letters to the Prime Minister, I commend my amendments to the Assembly, and I hope to see them supported.

MR PARTON (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (5.18): We are compelled to do many things in this place. As MLAs, we are compelled to be respectful to other members. We do not always comply, but we are supposedly compelled to do that. We are compelled to abide by your rulings, Mr Speaker. We are compelled to comply with the standing orders regarding question time and the proceedings here. We are not compelled to amend every motion that is before the Assembly. That is not a compulsion. We are not compelled to do that. You do not have to impose yourself on every debate.

The thing is that Mr Emerson is correct. Having regard to much of what he said here, most of the people in this chamber would agree with him. Most of the people, broadly speaking, in principle, agree with the ideas that Mr Emerson has put forward, because we have discussed them here before, and they have been involved in policy proposals from various parties. These are not Mr Emerson's ideas. I googled earlier: did Thomas Emerson invent the wheel? Apparently, it was not you, Mr Emerson; it was somebody else.

As a consequence, although we think there are some great ideas included here, we will not be supporting this amendment because I am not sure that it actually lines up with the motion as it stands at the moment.

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) (5.20): The government will not be supporting this amendment. I appreciate that Mr Emerson has gone to some effort to make it palatable or acceptable for government and as many people as possible in both (a) and (b). I appreciate that. But if you read (6) as a whole, Mr Speaker, it refers to “as many as possible”, while also seeking federal funding for these measures, presumably in writing, and reporting back on these measures in the next sitting week, which is about five weeks away.

The point is that with “as many as possible”, none are possible in that timeframe. It is not realistic. This is not an amendment that is grounded in reality, unfortunately. I appreciate that Mr Emerson's office sent through some journal articles to my office. I can assure him that we are well aware of the benefits of pop-up cycleways and that crises can be a great opportunity for governments to do things in an innovative way. But what is being suggested here costs money and takes longer than a few weeks. It

will take longer than a few weeks to get federal funding for measures that we do not have worked up. Quite honestly, there are already, through this motion and others, let alone everything else that has preceded this fuel crisis, so many variables impacting our buses and our road systems. This would introduce yet another variable for our road users, whether you are in a private vehicle or on public transport.

I do have to stress that, just like Mr Parton raised, these are good ideas, in and of themselves. Yes, we do have our pop-up cycleway on Bowen Drive. Minister Steel and I vividly remember announcing that and launching that about two years ago, but it cost money and it took time. While there is some great research elsewhere, it is also worth drawing on our own experience here.

It is a fact that we are one of the most car-dependent cities in Australia. This is not an ideological thing; it is a geographical one. We are doing our very best to address this, to make changes that do result in a mode shift. But in response to a supply crisis and in trying to get a mode shift in days or weeks, we do not have the preconditions in terms of density, the mixed-use neighbourhoods or the overall coverage to be able to shift meaningful numbers of people onto bikes and buses.

Reporting back in the next sitting week is not an accountability mechanism. I think that is a press release, if I am being kind. In terms of being ambitious, Mr Emerson was saying that these are ambitious reforms and that we do not have the will. That is simply not correct because, in the same breath, he noted that they are in our Active Travel Plan. Yes, they are; we will be implementing these, but we need to do it in a considered way and not in response to a crisis that is rapidly evolving, as Minister Orr rightly pointed out.

The notion that government could also just wave its wand and introduce 50c fares next week is fanciful. It is fanciful because there is a revenue impact. We all know that our public transport is heavily subsidised, and people generally are only paying a percentage of the actual cost of taking a trip on public transport.

The revenue that we do get, ultimately, in the scheme of things, is modest. It is modest in terms of the overall cost. But when we are in the situation we are in at the moment, where we have a fiscal sustainability committee that reported its interim report just this morning, saying that our revenue-raising opportunities are limited, which is something that has been known since pre self-government, what we were being asked to do was immediately to have a revenue impact on ourselves from one of the few revenue-raising measures that we have.

I think Mr Parton's back-of-the-envelope figures on radio this morning are right-ish, but it is probably closer to per month rather than for that period. I would need to look further at the detail. We are in a situation where we wish to continue the revenue measures that we have, because if we do not have them, we have to make it up from somewhere. We do not have an appropriation bill, as Minister Steel has pointed out repeatedly. So where will the money come from, if we do not have that revenue measure?

On the one hand, Mr Emerson says, "We're just going to write to the feds." His amendment says that we should be writing to the feds, but writing to the feds to seek

that funding is exactly what Minister Steel's amendment has sought to do, to seek that federal funding. The words are pretty similar, in calling on us to write, and we would be writing, if we were implementing Mr Emerson's amendment, "to seek federal funding".

Our amendment, in (4)(b), also says, "seek federal funding". That is because there is no mechanism for us at the moment to take a hit to revenue quite like that. I think it is reasonable, with regard to something that we did not ask for—we did not cause the situation—that the federal government would step in and help, as it has done in crisis periods. There is a powerful message to be sent by writing. It is something that, in fact, I will be asking members to do on Thursday, and I hope that that ask will not be treated with the same disdain.

I hope that I have explained why we cannot support this amendment today. I do not mean any disrespect, and I regret that Mr Emerson thinks that my office did not engage as much as we could or should have. The point that was being put was that the asks are very prescriptive and, by being so prescriptive, they simply are not achievable. We will not mislead the Assembly or the community about what is actually realistic at this point in time.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (5.29): The Greens will be supporting Mr Emerson's amendment today. While Mr Parton may be of the view that it is not central to the purpose of the motion that he moved, nonetheless it is relevant.

I am somewhat surprised by the government's distaste for the amendment. If the government's efforts at trialling speed limit reductions on Sherbrooke Street are anything to go by, the government is happy to run a trial of the concept in a single location without substantial development works. Given that the Belco busway was promised by ACT Labor at the last election, I would have thought that this would fit quite neatly with the idea of trialling dedicated bus lanes on rapid bus routes. I hope that the Belco busway will not be cancelled and will continue to be delivered for the Canberra community so that buses can move quickly, without getting caught up in traffic.

Pop-up separated cycle lanes sound to me like a great idea. I am quite happy to hear that Mr Parton seems also to be of the same view and is supportive of the idea of a cycle lane going down Northbourne Avenue. I will take his silence as agreement to that, and based on his comments, because, as proponents of cycling at Pedal Power have often told me, hate is not protection. If this is materially complicated, I worry that the Labor government may be envisaging an over-engineered approach to it.

Federal funding, of course, would help both projects, and I would welcome that, in addition to other ideas as well. I note that Mr Emerson's amendment does not specify a particular budget year and that the call seeking federal funding is in addition to clause (5)(a) and (b). Ultimately, anything that incentivises public transport and active travel, that takes traffic off our roads, reduces the demand for fuel during a supply crisis. That is the way we can meet the reduced supply that we are experiencing at the moment. In addition, it lowers the cost of living for all Canberrans.

Question put:

That **Mr Emerson's** amendment to **Mr Parton's** motion, as amended, be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 6

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

Noes 16

Andrew Barr	Mark Parton
Chiaka Barry	Marisa Paterson
Peter Cain	Michael Petterson
Leanne Castley	Chris Steel
Tara Cheyne	Rachel Stephen-Smith
Ed Cocks	Caitlin Tough
Jeremy Hanson	Taimus Werner-Gibblings
James Milligan	
Suzanne Orr	

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Emerson's amendment negated.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Papers

Motion to take note of papers

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

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

Statements by members

Canberra Comedy Festival

MR BARR (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism and Trade) (5.37): I rise this afternoon to pay tribute to the team behind the Canberra Comedy Festival. The first comedy festival was held in 2013, Canberra's centenary year. The festival was held as part of Canberra's 100th birthday, recognising that it had been part of Walter Burley Griffin's original plan for Canberra. The festival was a great success, and a commemorative pink t-shirt was minted. Since then, the festival has grown, featuring over 50 shows each year. This year, well over 20,000 tickets were sold. Venues were packed, bringing considerable numbers of people into the city centre. The festival is run by comedians and show producers, most of whom are of course affiliated with that great organisation Comedy ACT.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the festival committee for their volunteer efforts in running a world-class event for our city. I also acknowledge the wide range of sponsors who support and promote the event each year. The government is a very proud and long-term sponsor of the Canberra Comedy Festival through the ACT Events Fund. It is always a pleasure to attend events at the festival—and there are no jokes ever made about politicians, which is why it is such a great event and why it differs from

spending time in this chamber.

Multicultural affairs—Nowruz festival

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (5.38): I want to speak briefly about the opportunity I had on the weekend to celebrate the day of Nowruz at the embassy of Afghanistan last Sunday, an embassy due to close in June this year, with the hope that it will remain open for cultural and other celebratory events. Nowruz means New Day in the Persian language, and it is the Persian festival that celebrates the coming of spring. It is the equivalent of the traditional Iranian New Year and marks the exact moment of the spring equinox. This year, Nowruz came at a difficult time for so many in the region, and I was proud to be there in support of our community, particularly our Afghan community, who also celebrate this special celebration.

It was my honour to be hosted by His Excellency Wahid Waissi and the Afghan Peace Foundation in cooperation with many other worthy support groups and businesses—MTC FutureReady from Belconnen; MC Hub, Multicultural Hub; MARSS; Sureway; the Red Cross; St Vincent de Paul; and the Anti-Slavery Australia Organisation. It was a great afternoon. I stayed for about an hour and a half, I think, and got to stir the pot of a traditional Afghan meal. You can see it on my Facebook. So go and celebrate with me by looking at the little display I have put up there.

Dr Kerryn Coleman—secondment

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (5.40): I rise to note the recent short-term departure from the ACT of Dr Kerryn Coleman from her role as ACT Chief Health Officer as she undertakes a secondment with New South Wales Health. Dr Coleman started with the Population Health Division in 2017 following a career as a public health physician and was appointed to the role of the Chief Health Officer in December 2019. Shortly after Dr Coleman took on the role of ACT Chief Health Officer, we were faced with bushfires, smoke and, immediately following that, a global pandemic—not something she was necessarily expecting. Dr Coleman took these challenges in her stride and leveraged the lessons learnt from the COVID-19 response into future planning for other public health risks and hazards.

I have greatly appreciated Kerryn's counsel and advice over the last five years, and I valued her steadfast commitment to the promotion of healthy lifestyle choices. I recognise her work in developing preventive population and public health legislation, policy and strategy, and proficiently fulfilling a very broad range of statutory responsibilities under various public health legislation. I know she has been sorry not to be able to do more in her passion area of sexual health, but I hope she will be able to do so into the future. I know Dr Coleman has developed a deep love for Canberra and calls it home—and home will be here when she returns. But, for now, I wish her all the best in her secondment.

Faith—Eid al-Fitr

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (5.41): I want to take the time to acknowledge and celebrate Eid, one of the most significant occasions in the Islamic calendar, marked by

Muslim communities here in the ACT and across the world. Eid is a time of reflection, generosity and renewal. It is a time to mark the end of Ramadan, an occasion which centres on values that resonate deeply across all faiths and culture—compassion, gratitude and care for others. During Ramadan, many Muslims fast from dawn to dusk not only as an act of faith but also as a way to foster empathy for those less fortunate. Eid is a joyful culmination of that period, a time for families and communities to come together, share meals, give to charity and strengthen the bonds of connection.

In our diverse and vibrant community, Eid is also a reminder of the richness that cultural and religious diversity brings to our society. It is an opportunity for all of us, regardless of background, to learn from one another and to celebrate the values we hold in common. At a time when division can so easily take hold, occasions like Eid remind us of the importance of unity, respect and mutual understanding. To all those celebrating, I wish you and your families Eid Mubarak.

Disability—Variety fundraiser

MS TOUGH (Brindabella) (5.43): I want to take a moment to spotlight an incredible local fundraiser that could make a real difference for children with disability here in Canberra. Harjodh Singh is the owner of Head to Toe Therapies, a paediatric physiotherapy clinic in Tuggeranong. Every day he works closely with children living with disability and sees first-hand both the challenges they face and the incredible resilience they show.

This year, Mr Singh and his team are partnering with Variety, the children’s charity, to raise funds for a Trexo robotic walker. This incredible technology allows children with severe physical disabilities to stand and walk, in many cases for the very first time. What makes this even more powerful is that Mr Singh is not just fundraising; he will be running the full Canberra marathon next month, pushing his young nephew, Manvir, who has severe cerebral palsy. Like many children with similar conditions, Manvir does not have regular access to upright mobility. This campaign is driven by a deep understanding of just how life-changing that opportunity can be.

A single Trexo walker would benefit more than 20 children in Canberra, supporting vital physical outcomes like bone density, muscle strength, posture, circulation and long-term health, while also delivering something just as important—confidence, dignity and inclusion. If you are able to support this cause, you can search “Harjodh Singh” on the Canberra Marathon 2026 page or look on my socials. I wish Mr Singh the best.

Discussion concluded.

Adjournment

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

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

COTA ACT—UpstAgeing Canberra

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (5.44): I want to briefly speak about my attendance last Friday at the opening event for the UpstAgeing Canberra festival—a wonderful event over this week, ending on Sunday, to celebrate seniors and the creative spirit that they maintain and can exhibit in wonderful ways. It is the initiative of COTA for the first ever Creative Ageing Arts Festival to be held in Canberra. It is one of Canberra’s biggest community festivals in the calendar, with well over 200 events and performances so far. I commend the COTA website. It has a beautiful brochure with a series of events happening all over Canberra, until Sunday, next weekend.

UpstAgeing will bring together performances, exhibitions, workshops, talks and events designed by seniors for seniors in an organic way with which connectedness can be built within a demographic in most need of it. The festival comprises a series of events, highlights of which include dementia-friendly movie viewings at the Arc Cinema in Acton, a comedy show at the Ainslie Football Club, a tango performance at the Hughes Community Centre and plays at the Mill Theatre. It was great to attend last Friday.

As I call it, it is “UpstAgeing ageing”. “Ageing” is in the word “UpstAgeing”, but let’s call it “UpstAgeing ageing”, because that is what they are doing. Often ageing is connected with limitation, need and vulnerability, but what I saw on Friday demonstrated that our senior community in Canberra have plenty of spirit, confidence, courage and adventurousness to try new things in the creative arts. I commend all members of our community to really encourage our seniors by considering attending one of the many wonderful programs through this week, ending next Sunday. I again thank COTA for organising “UpstAgeing ageing”.

Suicide Prevention Australia—ACT LiFE awards

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (5.47): I rise to speak about Suicide Prevention Australia’s ACT LiFE Awards, which I attended on 3 March. Suicide Prevention Australia is the national peak body for the suicide prevention sector. I thank the CEO, Nieves Murray, and chair of the ACT board, Stephanie Hodson, for inviting me to join them in celebrating these awards and to speak at the event, and I thank all of the staff and board members of Suicide Prevention Australia for the work that they do every day.

For over two decades, Suicide Prevention Australia has hosted the LiFE Awards. LiFE stands for Living is For Everyone. These awards recognise the outstanding contributions to suicide prevention by individuals and organisations across the country. Each state and territory hosts local awards and the winners in each of the five categories proceed as finalists to the national awards. I congratulate all the nominees. It was clear to me, from listening to the MC talk about their achievements and from talking to many of them, that everyone in that room held a shared understanding of the importance of suicide prevention.

Aside from the statistics we are all too familiar with, we all know the devastating impact that suicide has and the contributing factors that people may face in our community. The ACT government, of course, funds a broad range of programs with a focus on suicide prevention, mental health promotion and social connection. We continue to work with the Australian government and local organisations to support suicide

prevention, intervention, postvention, and aftercare activities and services, as well as mental health and wellbeing supports.

The ACT government is continuing its priority focus on multifaceted approaches to suicide prevention in the ACT. Directorates and agencies strive to support an evidence based suicide prevention system that acts to prevent suicidal distress, strengthens access to support and is sustained by work across governments, sectors beyond health, service providers and communities. It is only through these collective efforts that we can prevent suicidal distress, suicide attempts and deaths by suicide in the ACT. Every effort to reduce and prevent suicide is important. It was an honour to acknowledge the valuable and important contribution of all nominees in working towards our shared goal of preventing suicide.

The award recipient of the Communities in Action category was Trek of All Trades. This award recognises grassroots leadership and community-led initiatives that foster connection, build resilience and create safe spaces for conversations about mental health and suicide prevention. Trek of all Trades is a convoy style trek across parts of Canberra and is dedicated to raising awareness of suicide prevention. It is organised by the Canberra based organisation I Got You, which, I have to say, rather swept the awards this year.

The award recipient for Outstanding Contribution in the Individual category was Leesa Mountford. The Outstanding Contribution awards celebrate individuals and organisations who work to reduce the rate and impact of suicide and have tremendous heart, skills and experience. Leesa is the co-founder and CEO of I Got You. After the loss of her son, Leesa is dedicated to suicide prevention, awareness, breaking the stigma surrounding mental health and, particularly, male suicide, with a real focus on young men in the trades. The award recipient for Outstanding Contribution in the Organisation category was also I Got You. I Got You, founded by Leesa, is a family-run business and charity dedicated to building suicide awareness and creating a support network for mental health and suicide prevention.

The award recipient of the Priority Populations category was A Gender Agenda. This award celebrates innovative service delivery that demonstrates cultural responsiveness, breaks down barriers, promotes inclusion and delivers improved outcomes for those at risk. A Gender Agenda is a community organisation supporting the intersex, trans and gender-diverse communities of Canberra and the surrounding regions through advocacy, training, education and social support.

The award recipient for Innovative Practice and Research was Nicole Sadler AM CSC. This award recognises innovative research and practical initiatives that enhance our understanding and effectiveness in suicide prevention, intervention and postvention. Nicole is a leader in trauma related mental health and is CEO of the Phoenix Australia Centre for Posttraumatic Mental Health.

I wish all the winners the very best at the National Suicide Prevention Conference in April.

International affairs—US-Iran war

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (5.52): In 2018, former US Republican Party political strategist, now vocal anti-Trumpist, Rick Wilson wrote a book called *Everything Trump Touches Dies*. Incredibly, the federal Labor government still does not seem to understand this basic fact despite eight years of additional evidence. Can anyone think of a single area which the United States and the world are better off as a result of any action taken by Donald Trump and his cabinet? *Everything Trump Touches Dies*—or #ETDD—makes it not only morally wrong that Prime Minister Albanese was the first national leader to voice support for the illegal US attack on Iran but also extremely foolish. Within a few days, it had already become clear that this illegal war was trending sharply away from the quick, victorious display of American power and masculinity that Trump envisaged. Prime Minister Albanese and Senator Wong must be hoping that no-one will remember their initial rushed statement of support and their commitment to assets in a defensive role. But the Greens will not let that be forgotten, especially in light of their hypocritical and again rushed legislation designed to slam the door on Iranians, Lebanese and others trying to flee the rapidly expanding war.

I will say it again: this war is wrong. It was launched in defiance of the international rules-based order that we notice that the Labor government does not talk about nearly as much as it used to. It was launched and is being conducted with blood-thirsty glee. The most senior people in the US government are talking on the record about sinking ships being fun and about Iranians being toast. It was launched with zero strategic preparation. Military strategists care about this the way a good surgeon would care about an unqualified doctor botching an easy operation. But the rest of us should care, too, because the human toll will be enormous—thousands already dead and injured, millions more displaced people, a rapid spike in the risk of terrorism, hate crimes, Islamophobia and anti-Semitism. We stand in full support of the Iranian community here in Australia, who are in fear of their loved ones' safety, as well as the wider Muslim, Jewish and Middle Eastern communities here in Canberra and Australia and also around the world, who see the likelihood of more instability and risk to their lives.

But the Greens also recognise that the harm done is likely to reach beyond even these things. Australia's food security is now under significant threat, not only because modern agriculture's reliance on synthetic fertilisers, of which, roughly a third passes through the Strait of Hormuz—but also because our supply chains are completely dependent on the thousands of diesel-powered trucks that move our food from farm to processing, to warehouse and to retail outlets in our cities. We already have nearly four million Australians living below the poverty line, including three-quarters of a million children. As food prices climb further out of reach and the supermarket shelves empty, how many people in this country will be going hungry? This illegal war is going to affect every single one of us.

Health—Endometriosis Awareness Month

MS TOUGH (Brindabella) (5.55): March is Endometriosis Awareness Month—and, if you thought I was going to go the whole month without mentioning it, you are mistaken. Endometriosis affects around one in seven women; yet, for far too long, it has gone unseen, unheard and misunderstood. That is why March is Endometriosis Awareness Month, with the theme being March into Yellow. Yellow is the colour used endometriosis awareness but it also represents visibility, hope and solidarity. It is about

shining a light on a condition that too many people are forced to suffer with in silence.

As most of the chamber knows, I first experienced symptoms when I was just 11 years old. I remember debilitating pain, overwhelming fatigue and missing days of school because I simply could not function. Like so many others, those symptoms were dismissed as “normal.” I was told it was just part of being a girl and something I needed to push through. I internalised that message and for years believed that pain was something that just happened. It was not until I was 24 that I finally received a diagnosis. That delay is sadly not unusual. On average, people with endometriosis wait 6.5 years for an accurate diagnosis in Australia. But, when I was diagnosed, that wait was 10 years. That is years of unmanaged pain, disrupted education, limited career opportunities and lasting impacts on physical and mental health. It is why awareness matters—not just symbolic awareness but awareness that leads to change.

Marching into yellow means listening to lived experience. It means believing people when they say they are in pain and it means turning those experiences into better systems of care. Here in the ACT, the inquiry into endometriosis and other pelvic pain conditions is an incredibly important step forward. It provides a formal mechanism for people’s stories to be heard and for gaps in our health system to be identified and addressed. Submissions to this inquiry close on 3 April, and I strongly encourage anyone with lived experience—patients, carers, clinicians, families and advocates—to have their say. Your voice matters and it can help shape better outcomes for future generations. I want to thank my social policy committee colleagues who are part of this with me.

There has also been important progress at a national level. In November, the Albanese government announced 11 additional Endometriosis and Pelvic Pain Clinics, bringing the total to 33 clinics nationwide, with at least one clinic in every Primary Health Network region. This is a significant step toward improving access to multidisciplinary, specialist care closer to home. Importantly, the existing 22 clinics will receive ongoing funding. From July 2026, these clinics will expand their services to include menopause-related care. That recognition matters because endometriosis does not simply disappear at one stage of life; it affects people across the lifespan, and our health system needs to reflect that reality.

But we’ve also had the horror this year of the stories coming out of Melbourne of a doctor performing unnecessary surgeries leaving women infertile, in debt and downright angry about their treatment. I share their anger that a doctor could get away with performing these unnecessary surgeries for so long. I feel for all those women who are impacted and all the women out there wondering whether they have had surgeries performed on them that they should not have.

Endometriosis is not just a health issue; it is a social, economic and equity issue. It affects access to education, participation in the workforce, financial security and overall quality of life. When pain is normalised and dismissed, it becomes harder to seek help and harder to be heard. So, as we March into Yellow this Endometriosis Awareness Month, let us keep pushing for change. Let us keep raising awareness, backing research, improving access to care and, most importantly, listening to lived experience. Together, we can build a future where no-one has to wait years to be believed, diagnosed and supported.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

The Assembly adjourned at 6.00 pm