



DEBATES
OF THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

DAILY HANSARD

Edited proof transcript

25 March 2026

This is an **EDITED PROOF TRANSCRIPT** of proceedings that is subject to further checking. Members' suggested corrections for the official *Weekly Hansard* should be lodged in writing with the Hansard office no later than **Wednesday, 15 April 2026**.

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Wednesday, 25 March 2026

(Quorum formed.)

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

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

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

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

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

Petitions

The following petitions were lodged for presentation:

Kaleen indoor sports facility—closure—petitions 84-25 and 31-26

By Mr Braddock, from 521 and 253 residents respectively:

To the Speaker and Members of the Legislative Assembly

The following residents of the ACT draw the attention of the Assembly to the imminent closure of the facility at 16 Georgina Street, Kaleen, including the Kaleen Indoor Sports Centre.

This facility has long been a cornerstone of the Yerrabi and broader northside community, providing a safe, warm and welcoming community space for people of all ages to play multiple organised sports, attend a gym 24/7, and socialise, particularly during Canberra's harsh winters.

There are many health and social benefits for the community being able to engage in sport all year round in an easy to access location. This decision has been made with minimal community consultation, leaving thousands of north Canberrans without access to such essential broad-based indoor sporting facilities.

Before proceeding with the closure, greater consideration should have been given to the needs of the northside community and the significant impact this decision will have on them.

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

1. Commit to building a new, publicly owned, comprehensive sporting facility in Kaleen or nearby suburbs, with meaningful consultation with the community on location, design and accessibility;
2. Consider compensating the business owners impacted by the closure of the complex at 16 Georgina Street; and
3. Explore legislative changes to protect community facilities from accessing lease variations that potentially rob the community of that facility.

To the Speaker and Members of the Legislative Assembly

The following residents of the ACT draw the attention of the Assembly to the imminent closure of the facility at 16 Georgina Street, Kaleen, including the Kaleen Indoor Sports Centre.

This facility has long been a cornerstone of the Yerrabi and broader northside community, providing a safe, warm and welcoming community space for people of all ages to play multiple organised sports, attend a gym 24/7, and socialise, particularly during Canberra's harsh winters.

There are many health and social benefits for the community being able to engage in sport all year round in an easy to access location. This decision has been made with minimal community consultation, leaving thousands of north Canberrans without access to such essential broad-based indoor sporting facilities.

Before proceeding with the closure, greater consideration should have been given to the needs of the northside community and the significant impact this decision will have on them.

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

1. Commit to building a new, publicly owned, comprehensive sporting facility in Kaleen or nearby suburbs, with meaningful consultation with the community on location, design and accessibility;
2. Consider compensating the business owners impacted by the closure of the complex at 16 Georgina Street; and
3. Explore legislative changes to protect community facilities from accessing lease variations that potentially rob the community of that facility.

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

Hawker—tennis centre—petitions 8-26 and 30-26

By Mr Cain, from 507 and 758 residents respectively:

To the Speaker and Members of the Legislative Assembly

This petition of certain residents of the Australian Capital Territory draws to the attention of the Assembly that:

1. Community sporting facilities play a vital role in fostering community cohesion and promoting health and wellbeing. High quality sporting facilities provide opportunities for participation, learning and personal development.
2. The Hawker Tennis Centre was established on block 9, section 3, Hawker, in 1977. The Centre became a highly valued and successful sporting facility which continued to serve the community until 2012.
3. Over the last 13 years the site has become derelict and is the subject of ongoing vandalism, dumping of rubbish and items associated with illegal drug use.

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

1. Terminate the Crown Lease and ensure public ownership of the site.
2. Commit to using the site for the purpose of sport and recreation facilities only, in consultation with the community.

To the Speaker and Members of the Legislative Assembly

This petition of certain residents of the Australian Capital Territory draws to the attention of the Assembly that:

1. Community sporting facilities play a vital role in fostering community cohesion and promoting health and wellbeing. High quality sporting facilities provide opportunities for participation, learning and personal development.
2. The Hawker Tennis Centre was established on block 9, section 3, Hawker, in 1977. The Centre became a highly valued and successful sporting facility which continued to serve the community until 2012.
3. Over the last 13 years the site has become derelict and is the subject of ongoing vandalism, dumping of rubbish and items associated with illegal drug use.

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

1. Terminate the Crown Lease and ensure public ownership of the site.
2. Commit to using the site for the purpose of sport and recreation facilities only, in consultation with the community.

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

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

Motion to take note of petitions

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

That the petitions so lodged be noted.

Kaleen indoor sports facility—closure—petitions 84-25 and 31-26

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (10.02): I am proud to sponsor the petition about the imminent closure of the Kaleen indoor sports facility. This facility has long been the cornerstone of the Yerrabi and the broader north side community, providing a safe warm and welcoming community space for people of all ages to play multiple organised sports, attend a gym 24/7 and socialise.

As the lead petitioner notes, there are many health and social benefits for the community to be able to engage in sport all year round in an easy-to-access location. The decision to close the centre was made with minimal community consultation, leaving thousands of north Canberrans without access to such essential broad-based indoor sporting facilities. Before proceeding with the closure, greater consideration should have been given to the needs of the north side community and the significant impact this decision will have on them.

I want to draw the Assembly's attention to the calls in the petition. The first is:

Commit to building a new, publicly owned, comprehensive sporting facility in Kaleen or nearby suburbs, with meaningful consultation with the community on location, design and accessibility;

This call is particularly pertinent because there is a lack of indoor sports facilities in the Gungahlin and Belconnen regions. The Gungahlin district currently lacks an indoor sports facility in entirety, a shortfall highlighted in the Gungahlin Community and Recreational Facilities Assessment in 2022, a study that was prompted after long-term advocacy from many, including myself, in the Gungahlin community. Whilst there is hope for a facility to be built in Casey, it is unknown when this will open its doors to the community. In the meantime, the burgeoning population of Gungahlin goes without.

The second call is:

Consider compensating the business owners impacted by the closure of the complex at 16 Georgina Street;

This is particularly pertinent in that, during a period where there is a lack of activation in the local area, the businesses nearby will be impacted. The third is:

Explore legislative changes to protect community facilities from accessing lease variations that potentially rob the community of that facility.

I support increasing housing infill, but we must ensure there are sufficient community and sporting facilities to meet the need of the increased population in those areas. I would call on the government to explore how both objectives can be achieved in close

proximity to each other, creating opportunities to build more housing in close proximity to recreational facilities such as an indoor sporting facility—activating space and increasing amenity whilst also building roofs over people’s heads.

I would like to thank the principal petitioner, who has been an absolute powerhouse, not only promoting this petition but also lobbying ministers and the ACT public service to bring this very important issue to our attention. I would also like to thank the Kaleen community and everyone beyond who has supported and rallied behind this petition.

Hawker—tennis centre—petitions 8-26 and 30-26

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (10.05): I rise today, with great pride, to present a petition on behalf of the residents of Hawker and the nearby suburbs and broader, regarding the future of the Hawker Tennis Centre. As was mentioned, the e-petition gathered 507 supportive signatures and the physical copies of the same petition gathered 758 physical signatures—for a total of 1,265. I want to acknowledge and give a great shout-out to the Hawker/Weetangera Neighbourhood Watch supporters and leaders and also Friends of Hawker Village, who, in particular, with the physical form of the petition, made sure these were distributed around the local shops and at different community events. I am so grateful to see the community rising up to a challenge about something of incredibly deep concern to them and to me.

A site that used to be a thriving sporting precinct has become dangerous—a place for dumping; a place where wood and other materials are piled and set on fire, where drug paraphernalia is found and where, unfortunately, police spot security issues around and on the site. So the members of the ACT community call on the ACT government to urgently intervene in this site—and I can touch on what I am aware the government is doing at this stage. For over 30 years, from its opening in 1977 until 2010, the Hawker Tennis Centre was a pillar of the Belconnen sporting community, coaching up to 400 students per week at its peak. Over a decade now, the community has watched this site fall into total dereliction. What was once a key pillar in Ginninderra’s community recreation sites is now a magnet for vandalism, illegal dumping and hazardous materials and activities.

Belconnen’s leisure and recreation infrastructure is shrinking, even though our population is growing and the footprint in Belconnen is expanding. The community is rightly distressed about this site. From the abandonment of this site to the prolonged closure of Big Splash, Ginninderra is effectively being stripped of pivotal community hubs, recreational spaces and sporting facilities. Upon Access Canberra’s inspection, the site has now been formally recognised as being unused for over 12 months, let alone over a decade, and it is time for real action. The petitioners are not just asking for a clean-up; they are asking for a commitment to officially bring a pivotal element of community sport in Belconnen back to life.

I would like to thank the passion and assistance of my constituents. I have mentioned two groupings of the local community who have really been at the forefront of promoting this petition and highlighting the concern of this site through social media and, as I said, through the distribution of the paper petition. I want to thank them. They know that I am available to agitate for other improvements in our local area. I call on the Assembly to reach out to the ACT government. I look forward to the minister’s

response. Unfortunately, it might be rather predictable—as we have seen from the Big Splash saga. But I am hoping it actually stimulates them into responding differently.

I am aware that a “show cause” notice was issued to the owners of the site on 23 February. The owner responded on 10 March to say that they would clear and clean the site by the end of this month. I will be having a look at that. They also alerted the government that they are urgently working on a DA for the site as a matter of urgency. We have already seen two DAs come and go with no action at all. So I will be watching. I will be checking with the local community groups as to what they are being told by government and I will be monitoring what action actually happens on the site before the end of this month, as has been promised. Again, if that is not carried through with—let alone the fact that the site remains unused and not used for the purpose of the lease—I will be watching and monitoring.

Hawker—tennis centre—petitions 8-26 and 30-26

Kaleen indoor sports facility—closure—petitions 84-25 and 31-26

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (10.10): I thank Mr Braddock and Mr Cain for bringing these petitions forward today. First of all, I want to have a bit of a check-in about Hawker—and I thank Mr Cain for bringing this one forward. I used to play at the Larkham’s a long time ago. That tennis has been shut down for a very long time now, and the community is really agitating to get that going again and to reclaim that community and recreational space so that it can be used by kids, by adults and by the local community.

We have lodged a lot of questions on notice and asked a lot of questions without notice on the Hawker tennis centre, and we have not received a lot of information back. We received information that a “show cause” notice has now been issued. I do not know what the show cause notice is for. I am assuming and hoping that it might be about the possibility of terminating the Crown lease, but I am not sure. We tend to hit a bit of a brick wall when we try and get more information about exactly what Access Canberra are doing on a site. I do not believe they have issued fines for non-use of the lease. I do not believe they have issued restitution orders and charged the owners of the lease to fix up that site. But we are still trying and waiting to get information about that. I understand Access Canberra’s role in this, but there is a degree of accountability that the community expects from the regulators, and I think it is reasonable for the community get this information to find out what Access Canberra are doing and what the actual timeline and course is.

We often hear about natural justice for the leaseholders. It is, of course, very important that we follow the law and observe natural justice for players. But there is also a level of fairness and accountability that the community expects from these sites, particularly when they are playing a role of community and recreational space and when the community has seen it lapse for such a long time. We have supported a number of constituents to lodge complaints about this site and to lodge controlled activity orders. There is a huge amount of agitation about this site. We really do need to see something happening there, but we also need a really open and honest update for the community about what action has been taken to date and what the likely pathway is—and, if things like fines could have been issued and were not, why not? What is the decision-making process that goes into that? It is an administrative decision like any other. Can we have some reasons there? Mostly, the community just wants to see that facility being used

again, and it would be great to get that returned. But there is a degree of, I think, caution and cynicism. Canberrans really are tired of these long-term lease squat situations where sites are unused. That is why I think the community is getting agitated much more quickly and getting active much more quickly to try and reclaim these spaces.

I also want to check in about the Kaleen indoor sports centre. It is not in Belconnen, but it does actually service the whole north side region, and a lot of Belconnen residents also use that area.

Mr Milligan: I think you mean Ginninderra.

MS CLAY: It is not in Ginninderra. It is not in our electorate, but it does actually service our whole area. The Belconnen Community Council has been pretty vocal about this one. Lachlan Butler has pointed out that the Belconnen population is going to be growing by 75,000 by 2065. There are a lot of people in our region already and there are going to be a lot more in our region, and we need to be making sure that we are planning our community and sporting facilities in these spaces to accommodate all those people and to make sure that we have good lives—not just homes but good lives—in the future. Lachlan has also pointed out that he is pretty cynical about the drop of recreational space from 3,823 metres squared to 1,733 metres squared and the fact that the basement car parking has been classified as indoor recreation floor space. I am equally confused by this. I do not think many of us understand how an indoor car park can be classified in that way or why these decisions were taken.

Mr Barr: Drive-in parking? Is that a recreation for Canberrans?

MS CLAY: Again, I think it would be really good if the government could take this matter seriously. The community takes this matter seriously. They do take their community and recreational space quite seriously and probably do not appreciate jokes being made about car parks being their recreational facilities, particularly out in Belconnen, where we have a bit less than maybe some areas in the inner north with large facilities being built with a lot of government investment. I think we are heading towards a world in which the community does expect a degree of accountability about what decisions are being made and how and really good clarity of the government's vision of where we are going to have our community and recreational space now and in the future.

Hawker—tennis centre—petitions 8-26 and 30-26
Kaleen indoor sports facility—closure—petitions 84-25 and 31-26

MS CARRICK(Murrumbidgee) (10.15): I would like to acknowledge the importance of the Hawker tennis centre and the Kaleen indoor sports centre. These facilities are far more than buildings with courts or fields; they are vital community hubs. They are places where people come together to socialise, to stay active and to participate in activities that promote health, wellbeing and enjoyment.

Many people, particularly those living in the south of Canberra, know all too well how deeply the loss of sports centres can be felt across an entire community. Parents and children are forced to travel further just to train or compete, and this is happening at a time when fuel shortages and the cost-of-living crisis are placing additional pressure on

families. These challenges make participation in sport less accessible, especially for young people. However, the impact of these closures extends beyond parents and children. The other businesses and services housed within these sports centres are also affected. Each closure represents lost foot traffic, lost income and lost livelihoods. It weakens the local economy and undermines the ecosystem that allows community sport to thrive. We deserve spaces that bring us together, not decisions that pull us apart.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

India trade mission Ministerial statement

MR BARR (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism and Trade) (10.17): In February, the government undertook a trade mission to India with a clear and strategic purpose to significantly grow the number of Indian students and visitors choosing Canberra. India is a priority partner for Canberra, our largest diaspora community and one of the world's largest and fastest growing economies. We placed an emphasis during the mission on promoting Canberra's two major export industries: tourism and our largest export industry, international education.

The trade mission was coordinated by the Office for International Engagement in collaboration with VisitCanberra, Study Canberra, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Austrade, Tourism Australia and Cricket ACT, and featured senior representatives from Canberra's major tertiary institutions: the University of Canberra, the University of New South Wales Canberra—both of which have a growing presence in India—as well as the Australian National University and the Australian Catholic University.

Mr Speaker, we know that if we succeed in significantly increasing the number of Indian students studying in Canberra, we will also grow our tourism sector, strengthen cultural links within the community and bolster the international aviation connections that support our visitor economy.

When we promote Canberra to students and families in India, the message is strong: Canberra is one of the world's most liveable cities and one of the safest capital cities anywhere in the world. We offer high-quality, globally recognised education, delivered by outstanding universities and vocational education and training institutes, and we have a network of world-class research institutions. Critically, Canberra offers strong pathways to employability, with close connections between universities, government, industry and innovation sectors. So, students who choose Canberra are not just choosing a university; they are choosing a city where they can study, work, build careers and connect directly with Australian national institutions and global research leaders.

This combination of liveability, safety, quality and employability is what makes Canberra uniquely attractive for Indian students and their families. India's young and globally minded population is seeking high quality international education, and Canberra is well placed to meet that demand.

Across our nation, Indian students represent around 17 per cent of all international

enrolments, making India one of the most important education markets in the world. India is already our territory's second-largest international student market, with more than 3500 Indian students—a little over 1900 at universities and 1600 at vocational institutions—studying in Canberra last year.

Mr Speaker, our ambition now is to double that number to 7000 students by 2030. Achieving that goal will deliver significant benefits for the territory economy. Every international student studying here contributes to local jobs, local businesses and the culture of our community. But importantly, international students also drive visitation. Students bring families, they bring visiting friends and relatives, and they become long-term ambassadors for Canberra who either build a future here or return as tourists later in life.

Canberra's universities, research institutions and innovation ecosystem position our city as Australia's knowledge capital, offering students access to world-leading research, policy expertise and global networks. These strengths were strongly recognised throughout our engagements in India.

In New Delhi and Bengaluru, the delegation met with universities, education agents, school counsellors, tourism partners, corporates, government representatives and Australian diplomatic officials on the ground in India. These engagements focused on expanding education pathways, strengthening alumni networks, supporting student mobility and building long-term institutional partnerships.

The trade mission also reinforced the important connection between education and Canberra's visitor economy. India currently contributes around 15,000 visitors annually to the ACT, representing approximately seven per cent of all international arrivals. This includes leisure travellers, visiting friends and relatives, business visitors, international students and school groups. India is the largest country in the world, and therefore represents one of the territory's most significant tourism growth opportunities. Given this strong foundation and the important presence of Indian student and diaspora communities in Canberra, our mission included direct engagement with Indian travel agents and tourism partners to convert the interest that is there into visitation.

I took the opportunity to engage with media outlets in India with a broad reach both New Delhi and Bengaluru, ensuring Canberra is clearly understood in India as a world-class destination for study and leisure. This is critical to our longer-term goal of rebuilding international aviation links to India, through the resumption of direct flights to Canberra from Singapore Airlines. India's importance to that strategy cannot be overstated. Singapore Airlines has direct flights to Singapore from all of the major Indian cities including New Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Chennai, Hyderabad, Kochi, Ahmedabad, Kolkata and Amritsar. These services could feed Indian tourists into a future direct Singapore-to-Canberra service. Doubling the number of Indian tourists visiting Canberra each year to reach 30,000 visitors annually would mean around 600 tourists per week—effectively filling the equivalent of two international flights.

This Indian tourism growth goal, combined with increased visitor numbers from the United Kingdom, Europe, China and the ASEAN nations, is what is required to support the resumption of Singapore Airlines services to Canberra, and will greatly impact our ambition of growing overall visitor expenditure and the territory economy by an

additional \$1 billion by 2030.

The mission also advanced deeper partnerships in education and research. In Bengaluru, the delegation met with The Honourable Dr MC Sudhakar, Minister for Higher Education for Karnataka, to discuss opportunities for collaboration between territory institutions and universities across the state. These discussions explored opportunities in transnational education programs, released research collaboration and expanded student mobility. The delegation also participated in an industry roundtable with multinational businesses operating in India, focusing on workforce needs within Bengaluru's advanced industries and how Canberra's universities can support the development of specialised global talent pipelines.

Whilst in Bengaluru, we also visited the Indian Institute of Science, including the Centre for Nano Science and Engineering. This centre is one of two Indian partners in a major Indo Australian space collaboration led by Canberra-based company Skykraft, which is a University of New South Wales Canberra spin-off. They are developing technologies to improve precision, navigation and timing in low earth orbit.

Under the Australian Space Agency's International Space Investment India Program, Skykraft will receive up to \$3.7 million to support this collaboration. This partnership highlights the strength of the existing scientific relationships between Canberra and India and the opportunities for further collaboration in aerospace, engineering and advanced manufacturing.

The mission also showcased Canberra's cultural connections with India, including a visit to the *Songlines: Tracking the Seven Sisters* exhibition at the Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, developed in partnership with Canberra's National Museum of Australia and proudly supported through the ACT's Major Event Fund.

This trade mission reinforced the genuine and growing friendship between Canberra and India. It strengthened partnerships across education, research, tourism and innovation. But most importantly, Mr Speaker, it reinforced the scale of opportunity in front of us.

Should we succeed in growing the Indian student cohort to 7000 by 2030, we will strengthen our universities, grow tourism, deepen cultural ties and support the growth of international aviation connections to our city. The government will continue to work closely with our higher education institutions, tourism partners and the Australian government to convert the relationships built through this mission into real outcomes for our city.

In closing, want to thank the education leaders, including vice-chancellors, rectors and other senior leaders, our industry partners and the ACT government officials for their significant contributions to the success of this mission. I particularly acknowledge the support of Australia's diplomatic representatives in India, many of whom have strong connections to Canberra, particularly His Excellency Philip Green OAM, Australian High Commissioner to India, and Ms Hilary McGeachy, our Consul-General in Bengaluru. Finally, I acknowledge staff from the Office for International Engagement, Study Canberra and VisitCanberra for their work in delivering this mission.

I present the following paper:

India trade mission—Ministerial statement, 25 March 2026

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Digital Health Record—benefits realisation yearbook Ministerial statement

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (10.28): Mr Speaker, I rise today to present the Assembly with the first *Digital Health Record Benefits Realisation Yearbook*—clear evidence that one of the most significant reforms in our health system is delivering real benefits for Canberrans.

This yearbook highlights what the Digital Health Record (DHR) is achieving in practice: safer care, better patient experiences, and a more connected and reliable health system. Since going live in late-2022, the DHR has become part of everyday care across our hospitals, clinics, community services and home-based care. Three years on, it is firmly embedded and the results are clear. First and foremost, patients are benefiting.

Through the MyDHR app and website, Canberrans now have timely access to their own health information—appointments, test results, correspondence, discharge summaries and selected clinical notes—all in one place. By December last year, more than 271,000 Canberrans had an active MyDHR account. That level of uptake reflects growing trust and confidence in how we manage health information.

Timely access is making a real difference. In 2025 alone, more than 826,000 test results were released to patients within a single day, with outpatient services achieving an 85 per cent same-day release rate. Faster access reduces anxiety, supports more informed conversations with clinicians, and helps people take a more active role in their care.

The yearbook also shares powerful stories from patients and families managing chronic and complex conditions. They tell us that having information, appointments and communication in one place has reduced duplication, simplified care, and strengthened relationships with care teams.

Clinicians are also seeing the benefits. The DHR has replaced fragmented and sometimes paper-based, workarounds with connected workflows and real-time information. More than 98 per cent of staff have now completed DHR training, representing a significant uplift in digital capability across our health workforce. Community nurses now access patient records securely from mobile devices during home visits, uploading clinical photos for immediate specialist review. Allied health professionals report less administrative burden and more time with patients. Pharmacy teams have transitioned to fully digital medication management, improving safety and enabling new models of care—including remote clinical pharmacy services. This is

modern healthcare in action; more connected, more efficient and safer for patients.

At a system level, the impact is equally strong. Digital medication management and real-time alerts have prevented tens of thousands of potential medication errors including duplicate therapies, allergy risks and unsafe doses—intervening before harm can occur. Operational dashboards are supporting better decision making across emergency departments, theatres and inpatient wards.

These capabilities are contributing to improved patient flow, including through measurable improvements in four-hour emergency department performance and reduced bed block. Nearly 90,000 unnecessary blood draws have been avoided, saving clinicians time, and sparing patients discomfort and delays. Our understanding of activity and efficiency has improved, with around 7,500 additional units of hospital activity being captured. This is strengthening service planning and the alignment of funding with activity—supporting, and supported by, the implementation of activity-based funding.

Just as importantly, the DHR has significantly improved system reliability. Initially, the DHR allowed for the consolidation of approximately 40 legacy systems into a single platform. With continued implementation work, this has now grown to more than 50 applications. ICT incidents have reduced by more than 60 per cent, and there have been no unplanned outages in the DHR in the past two years. Mr Speaker, we cannot avoid all ICT problems and there have continued to be occasional incidents in some parts of the system, but this level of reliability is an important step forward for the delivery of safe, high-quality care.

The *Benefits Realisation Yearbook* brings these achievements together in one transparent, evidence-based account. It shows what is working well, highlights real stories from patients and clinicians, and demonstrates how this major reform is delivering value for the ACT community. The yearbook is also clear that digital transformation is never static. It identifies areas where further improvement is needed, such as reducing administrative burden, improving consistency across specialised services and strengthening data and reporting capabilities. Work is already underway in each of these areas, guided by clinicians and operational leaders.

I am also well aware that some areas of the workforce continue to have feedback about the usability of DHR in their context, including our highly valued midwives. Digital Canberra and CHS leadership will continue to listen to feedback from staff and engage with them to ensure the DHR works as well as possible for them in their specialised needs. As the DHR continues into its next phase, our focus is firmly on optimisation; building on what has been achieved, deepening integration, and continuing to improve patient and clinician experience and—this is not in my circulated speech, but—also improving those connections with primary care and general practice and private specialists.

The message of the yearbook is clear: the DHR is not just a piece of technology; it is a foundation for safer care, a more empowered workforce and better experiences for consumers, carers and families across the ACT. In closing, the yearbook is a celebration of the dedication of our clinicians and staff, and the trust placed in our system by the community. It shows that this reform is delivering on its promise and that Canberrans

are seeing the benefits in their care every day.

I present the following papers:

Digital Canberra—Digital Health Record Yearbook 2025, undated.

Digital Health Records Benefits Realisation Yearbook—Ministerial statement, 25 March 2026.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the ministerial statement.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS (Brindabella) (10.34): Just very briefly about the benefits of DHR. Last year I spoke with what, I think, most in this Assembly would recognise as uncharacteristic self-absorption about my own experience of my DHR as a patient with a chronic health condition, and the benefits of DHR being the real-time access to results—for instance, from blood tests—and how clear the information is displayed in those test results, and the ability to identify yellow flags, red flags and compare trends. But there is probably an argument to say that the real magic of the DHR system goes unseen by the general public.

A very brief example of this is that a friend of mine was having a conversation with her daughter, who is a nurse at Canberra Hospital. The daughter mentioned that DHR automatically calculates exactly how many tablets of a certain medication is required to deliver the dosage that a physician has ordered. Previously, this had to be done manually and so there was the possibility of human error. But, because of DHR, the nurse said that this automatic, accurate provision of necessary information is a boost to the quality of care provided and saves the nurse's time when she is doing her rounds, as well.

So, the fact that users on the front end of the DHR system are getting so much benefit out of it, combined with very important users on the back end of the DHR system finding that it is making their jobs more effective and enabling them to do more accurate work, I think that is the definition of a win-win situation. I commend the minister and her team on the success of DHR so far.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Regional plans—Belconnen 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) (10.36): I rise to update the Assembly on the status of projects and commitments being delivered in the Belconnen region from ACT Labor's practical and targeted regional plan. Our plan for Belconnen was the result of a significant amount of community consultation. It was the outcome of what Minister Berry, the Labor team and I heard in conversations at front doors, on the phones and by

the shopping centres.

Having stood outside shops across the electorate, listening to what people wanted to see, it is no surprise that upgrades to the public amenity of those shops was of particular importance to residents. It is why we took a range of shop upgrades to the election across the territory, and why we have begun delivering on them.

These commitments include public space upgrades at the Charnwood and Kippax shops. Charnwood shops are a valued community hub, catering to local residents and those in the surrounding suburbs. Having already completed a round of upgrades at Charnwood—including new seating, plantings, shade, artworks including a fabulous mural, ramps and safety improvement—we committed to a further stage of upgrades because it was clear there was a bit more to do.

In the 2025-26 budget we funded those further upgrades, and that design work is currently underway. I look forward to sharing more details with the community as that work progresses. It may include: newer improved lighting; furniture; pathways and paving; playground equipment; artwork; signage; new landscaping and tree plantings; and something that I am especially prioritising is improved traffic and car parking arrangements. I thank Minister Berry for her advocacy on these upgrades, and I look forward to working with her and the community to deliver them.

We have also recently completed work at Macquarie and Evatt shops, which did include a new toilet. The works completed at these shops have improved access and the overall look and feel of the shops. They have new seating, tables, more trees, murals and improved landscaping, and so these areas are becoming places where people actually want to stop, relax and spend more time. And again, both shops have beautiful murals.

When you head down to the shops, one of the first things you see so often are the playgrounds for the kids. We know that parents and kids alike love their playgrounds and open spaces, and that is why we have committed to a range of upgrades to these spaces. And I have really enjoyed hearing feedback about the upgrade and contribution of the play area at Evatt.

In line with our commitment to improving playgrounds across Canberra and providing people of all ages and abilities with fun, creative and engaging play experiences, design is underway for a new all-abilities public playground in Florey. Design work is also underway on the upgrade to the playground and to provide a public toilet in Umbagog District Park, as well as the upgrade to the local neighbourhood playground on Jeffery Place in McKellar.

Construction commenced in January 2026 on the new toilet facility at the playground near the Dunlop shops on Shoobridge Circuit. The facility will include a unisex accessible toilet with a baby change table, encouraging people to stay longer at the playground and enjoy more time in their local neighbourhood.

To improve access and amenity in Palmerville Heritage Park, we have recently completed the construction of a new 600-metre recreational walking loop around the park. It connects with the existing path network, creating a 1.2-kilometre loop around the park. People do not have to use that constructed walking loop, however, I do see it

in use, and it has been particularly good when it rains.

I do reflect, Mr Speaker, that there is a motion on the notice paper about the Belconnen town centre master plan—something in which I was heavily involved during the consultation, and which I review and reflect on regularly. I have been personally involved in suggesting—and now completing—many of the recommendations of the master plan. There a handful outstanding which remain relevant, and delivering on these has been a priority for me. It is why they are key features in our Belconnen regional plan.

Design work is already underway on the plans to widen and renew the Emu Bank foreshore. This work will include new landscaping, murals, picnic tables and a new water play area to support the renewal of a rapidly growing Belconnen town centre.

The town centre will also benefit with upgrades to Margaret Timpson Park, including new play equipment, toilets and an accessible ramp, as well as lighting and amenity upgrades. That design work is nearing completion, and we look forward to sharing these plans with the community soon.

To the west of Belconnen, operational crews across City Presentation and the Parks and Conservation Service have been working collaboratively to manage bushfire fuel risks in accordance with the updated Regional Fire Management Plan. These works include a seasonal slashing program, strategic livestock grazing, chemical treatments and hazard reduction burns to reduce residual fire risk on directorate-managed land. The works recognise the need for climate adaptation in fire management practices. They also mitigate bushfire risks to ecological and cultural values.

The Parks and Conservation Service is also working hard to upgrade and realign four sections of the Shepherd's Lookout track in Woodstock Nature Reserve. This project will reduce steep gradients, upgrade the track surface and create better links to Shepherd's Lookout and the Uriarra Trail. When complete, old sections of the track will be rehabilitated to restore natural vegetation and to protect the surrounding environment. The track remains open to the public while this work is underway.

Mr Speaker, we understand that the sooner you can get home from work, the more time you have to enjoy our upgraded public spaces. That is why we are making strategic investments in our road and active travel networks. Last year, we completed the Gundaroo Drive duplication—a significant milestone in improving connectivity across north Canberra. This major upgrade has transformed Gundaroo Drive into a safer, smoother dual carriageway between Ginninderra Drive and the Barton Highway.

The project delivered two lanes in each direction, 6.4 kilometres of new on-road cycle lanes, upgraded intersections, widened roundabouts, new bridges over Ginninderra Creek, and wider, better-lit underpasses with improved path connections. Public transport users also benefit from new and upgraded bus stops. Further, more than 680 new trees having been planted along the corridor. Together, these improvements better connect Gungahlin and Belconnen, and they make it easier and safer for Canberrans to drive, cycle, walk and to catch public transport—and we kept the speed limit at 80 kilometres an hour.

Main construction work is scheduled to start on the William Hovell Drive duplication in April, pending pre-construction approvals, to duplicate 4.5 kilometres of William Hovell Drive from Drake Brockman Drive to John Gorton Drive. This will improve safety, travel times, and relieve congestion for road users in Canberra's western suburbs. The construction of the remaining stages of the Kuringa Drive shared path, enhancing the connection through to the Spence shops and to Tillyard Drive is underway. We also have a dedicated \$5 million fund for footpaths for Belconnen. This fund will be used to upgrade, maintain and build new footpaths to make Belconnen suburbs more accessible and better connected.

We are delivering the next stages of the Lake Ginninderra path upgrade, building on work already underway to widen and improve the path next to John Knight Memorial Park and along the eastern foreshore. On the completion of that, I hear feedback on all the time. Construction of a seven-kilometre walking and cycling path along William Hovell Drive to connect west Belconnen with the city is being planned. A new asphalt off-road path along William Hovell Drive between Drake Brockman Drive and John Gorton Drive is going to be delivered as part of the William Hovell Drive duplication project. Planning for the off-road path segment between John Gorton Drive and Bindubi Street is underway and will need to cater for future intersection upgrades to support a future Bindubi Street extension into Molonglo Valley.

Mr Speaker, we took a practical plan to the election to deliver upgrades to Belconnen's suburban infrastructure. I am proud to be working with my colleagues to deliver these commitments and in making Belconnen an even better place to live, shop and invest. Minister Berry and I look forward to working with our colleagues and constituents to get the best outcomes for our community over the rest of the term.

I present the following paper:

A copy of the statement.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (10.45): I thank the minister for the update on the Belconnen plan. There are a few big-picture things that were not in that update. I do not know whether they are not progressing or whether maybe they just belong somewhere else, but they are pretty core to the way Belconnen is shaping up. I will mention them here, and I hope that we can get a bit of work done and get some clarity on those.

Firstly, we need a school in the Belconnen central district. We had a lot of conversations about that in the last term. I led a lot of advocacy about that. We have 10,000 people in that region. We do not necessarily need the school to be built tomorrow, but we do need some clarity on where that school will go and whether it will be a primary school and high school or just a primary school, so that we can make plans and make sure that we do not run out of land in that central area for what we know that we already need, and that we will certainly need even more in future.

I know that, with light rail stage 3, Minister Steel is not keen to talk about planning for

the next steps, but it remains puzzling for a lot of us as to how we are going to have so much development in our region, out to Kippax, around UC and at the north-side hospital, when we do not have the planning work, the feasibility work and real clarity on where the route alignment is.

Again, I do not think that anybody in Belconnen expects construction on light rail stage 3 to start tomorrow, or contracts to be signed, but we are expecting some planning work, so that we know how all these major facilities in our district will fit in, and to make sure that we are not doing work twice. It is about making sure that we are not extending roads or building busways and finding that we have not done the planning work and that we need to go back and do that again, or that we have missed out on putting in some shared paths or bike paths.

Similarly, I was interested that the Belconnen busway was not included in this statement. Maybe it belongs somewhere else. Yesterday, in a debate, we seemed to get some resistance and opposition to calls for bus lanes and to support rapid services. The Greens found that concerning. Infrastructure Australia has helped to fund the feasibility study into the Belco busway, and that report was due in early 2026, which is about now. We would be expecting an update on that soon.

We know that work has progressed, because a freedom of information request revealed a document by WSP titled *Belconnen to city transit way feasibility study—planning report*. That was finalised for government in June last year. It was heavily redacted, so we do not know what the conclusions were, but we know that that report exists. I am concerned that it has not been mentioned today.

That was an election promise made by the Labor Party for Belconnen. That election promise came after a huge amount of advocacy in the Assembly. There was a motion by Mr Parton, there was a motion by me, and there was a clear Assembly commitment to deliver the Belco busway. We are moving into a period of increased congestion and higher fuel costs. We certainly need the planning, the feasibility, and the Belco busway to progress, so that we can have the buses that we need. I am hoping that we get an update from the Labor Party on that soon, and I am hoping that we see something in the June budget on the Belco busway. We did not hear about the R2 and the R3, but we have heard a lot about that. I think we are likely to get a good result on that. That core public transport is really important for us in Belconnen.

We also did not hear about some of the long-term lease squatting situations in Belconnen. These are all around Canberra. The ones in Belconnen that are causing people concern, of course, are Big Splash and the Hawker tennis centre. We understand that these sit with Access Canberra, but they are of high interest to the community. I think the community would like clear updates and clear progress, and an understanding of how these decisions are being made and what the pathway on these is. They are not government facilities, but they are core community and recreational facilities that provide a lot of value.

There is good news. There are a lot of things that have progressed in Belconnen that were not mentioned in the minister's speech. I will touch on some of those. They were all things on which the Greens did a fair amount of advocacy, and it is really pleasing to see those come along. We have some extra crossings around Jamison and near

Canberra high, which is really good. There is still a bit of work to do to make that a really friendly pedestrianised area, particularly given that, in that region, we have a lot of missing middle and apartments. A lot of people have chosen to live there because they have mobility impairments, they are visually impaired or they do not want to or cannot drive.

We did a doorknock with John Bowman, who is a visually impaired man who lives in Cook, and he needs to be able to walk from his home to the shops. When we did that doorknock, we happened to doorknock five other people living in that area who were also visually impaired. It is clear that a lot of people have chosen to live there so that they can walk around. It was great to see some of those crossings come along. There is a little bit more work to do, but it was good to contribute to that community campaign and to get some progress.

I sponsored last term a petition to get Canberra high air conditioning installed. That came to me from one of the students who had noticed that her classrooms were over 31 degrees, which adults would not tolerate, nor would our unions allow us to, frankly. Government have now installed air conditioning in three of those classrooms. I think some of the classrooms still do not have air conditioning, but it is great that there was some improvement there as a result of the students lobbying government. It would be great if government could manage to do that work for all of our schools. It would be great to see safe learning environments for our kids without the need for that targeted advocacy, but it was good to see some progress there.

The Belconnen markets diagonal crossing has been fixed up. This was a great zebra crossing that led to tanbark and a sharp gutter, instead of an actual footpath, and that has now been adjusted. It was good to see that fixed up, after a bit of advocacy that we ran. We are getting some progress on our missing path network in the Kippax to Belconnen link. Those in Belconnen will be really pleased to see that. I believe we are going to get our R2 and R3 buses restored. We have heard a lot about that. It is a shame that we had to lose it for six months, but it does look like really good work is happening on that now.

I was pleased to hear about the upgrades for Margaret Timpson Park. A lot of us here campaigned for a long time for some upgrades to Margaret Timpson Park, for some basic things like a playground and barbecues. We are now getting those things, after a long period in which everybody was told, "No, kids can just walk to John Knight Memorial Park." Older kids can walk to John Knight Memorial Park, but it is a very long way to go if you are two or three and you have little legs. It is good to see that we are getting some upgrades there. I am a bit disappointed that we had to wait for a federally funded barbecue before we could get those, but I am really glad that we have commonwealth funding and that we are getting those upgrades.

We have asked the minister several times for updates on how those upgrades will be done, because there is a real opportunity to make sure that we have good flow in that park and that some of the construction around there is built in such a way that we get a really good, activated community recreational space there. We have not managed to get any information back or any briefings on where the community consultation is up to. I am certain that the community will have a lot to say, so we need to make sure that we are getting that information back through to our members here and, more importantly,

out to the community about that.

It was also great to see mention of the Dunlop shops upgrades. Of course, it is a bit of a shame that the primary—only—anchor tenant, the supermarket, will be closing. That is not within the control of the government, but the Coffee Scroll is there. The Coffee Scroll has been lobbying for quite a long time for a bit of help to have power, electricity, out there, and had hoped to be able to get that as part of the toilet. Apparently, that was not possible, which is a shame.

I do not know whether there is any other support that the government can give, but the community in Dunlop at the moment is faced with losing its only shop, which is the supermarket, and we are not sure about whether they will keep their coffee van or not. If both of those go, that will be a huge loss to that community. It was good to see that Minister Berry has a petition on this. I am not sure what Minister Berry's petition will deliver, but it is great when a minister sets up expectations of helping to fix those local shops. We are looking forward, out Dunlop way, to seeing what government assistance we will have to make sure that there will be a shop and that the Coffee Scroll or some other hospitality venue will be supported out there.

There is a bit of work that needs to be done around the Belconnen Library. Everybody understands that that is a particularly run-down area. We know that there is a lot happening in this area and that there is a heritage listing. I think everybody understands this. There is a small job of work to be done to fix this up so that it meets bare-minimum requirements for people who are visually impaired or people who have mobility issues.

It is really important to get that fixed up; that is the case anywhere, but particularly where you have facilities like the Belconnen Library, the Senior Citizens Club, the Capital Region Community Services and places that people go to a lot. We have government and Access Canberra facilities and Margaret Timpson Park. We would expect that a lot of people need to use this area, and a lot of the people using it may well have disability and access issues.

There are some small changes that definitely need to be made as soon as possible, like visual markers on steps, handrails and things. There is probably also a need for a future plan for how we will upgrade this area, with the Belconnen Library and Capital Region Community Services in that area.

It is great to hear about some of these updates and progress. It is good to see some of those local shop upgrades coming through, but there is still quite a lot that our growing region in Belconnen needs.

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (10.55): There are a couple of things in the minister's statement on the Belconnen region that I want to talk about. I thank Ms Clay for her advocacy for the region and for some of the things she said. I note the minister said that she and her colleague Minister Berry have done a significant amount of community consultation. I would love to see the schedule of the community consultation they have done. As ministers in this government, I would welcome their being transparent about who they have spoken with, when and how often.

The statement just alludes to front doors, phones and shopping centres. Feel free to

provide all of that, too, as part of your schedule. You are ministers in the government. How about telling us to whom you have been speaking, how frequently and what really came out of that? That would be a welcome contribution. The minister has an opportunity to provide a schedule of her work.

There are things that were not mentioned in the minister's statement which are incredibly pertinent, and very current and relevant to the people of Belconnen. There was no mention of sport and recreation. Of course, the minister probably does not want to talk about that because we have the Big Splash failure and the Hawker tennis centre failure. I can understand why the minister does not want to talk about sport and recreation, but it is disappointing that they will not even touch on an area that is current and of grave concern to the Belconnen community.

The minister touched briefly on the Belconnen town centre master plan and how much work had been done. They cannot wait to tell us how they have implemented that plan, but the minister did not seem to recall that that plan was in 2016, over a decade ago.

Ms Cheyne interjecting—

MR CAIN: It is not in the text. It was over a decade ago, a plan for the Belconnen town centre. It is over a decade old, and she said, "We're looking at seeing what we've done there, and we'll let you know about it." How about you do that a lot sooner than a decade later? I think that is quite a reasonable thing to expect, isn't it? Isn't that a reasonable thing to expect? It is a decade later. Let us get a real list of the things that have been accomplished, that that town plan has listed in it, and let us see what the minister can really talk about there.

I have been speaking about Margaret Timpson Park for quite a while now. I do welcome the commonwealth's contribution to the toilet block and some amenities for that area. I am disappointed in the Labor ministers, and the Greens members as well, for not supporting a very reasonable expansion of the green space in Margaret Timpson Park.

Mr Braddock, just this morning, talked about the lack of concern about community spaces in Gungahlin. We have an increasingly densified town centre. We have families choosing to live in apartments around the Belconnen town centre. I have spoken to one, and they say, "We would love a bit more green space right where we have chosen to live and raise our children." Unfortunately, the anti-green-space Greens continue to say no.

Mr Pettersson: Shame!

MR CAIN: I agree. Thank you, Minister Pettersson. I look forward to Mr Pettersson supporting the expansion of Margaret Timpson Park, based on that comment. I thank him for his support. I will put something in front of you for you to sign; how is that?

I know that the argument is, "We need housing, we need housing." With the development near the Belconnen markets, out of 420 dwellings, 315 will be affordable and social housing. The government has that trigger to control and to provide community and affordable housing, and the development around the Belconnen town centre is by no means over.

I am really disappointed in the Greens. They are denying something that should be a primary driver for them, as a party for the environment. I agree with Minister Pettersson: shame on them for not supporting a slightly bigger park, when the park is losing some green space, with welcome facilities—a toilet block and playground. I welcome that, but that means there is, of course, a slightly lesser green footprint. It is really disappointing—the anti-green-space Greens. Mr Pettersson, I thought you might—

Mr Pettersson: I feel like the joke has passed, Mr Cain.

MR CAIN: Is that right? It is on the record, Mr Pettersson. It is on the record, Minister. I would like to see that. I will not forget about this one, because I think it is a real priority for the people who live in those apartments to have a bit more green space. I am sure that would be welcomed by them.

There is \$5 million for footpath upgrades. I encourage the minister to go for a walk around west Belconnen. If she walks along some of the footpaths, having said how much money is being spent, she can see what the outcomes are. The outcomes are not to the liking of many people who live, particularly, in west Belconnen.

Ms Clay brought up the Belconnen Library. I have been out there with a visually impaired resident, and they have pointed out the very obvious noncompliance issues around the library, with the steps. That remains a problem that has just not been solved. It is nice to hear the government say, “We’re actually doing things for a region that we collect taxes from.” Thank you for being a government that says, “Yes, we know there are footpaths. We know there are roads. We know there are shopping centres. We know that those things exist, and we’re making sure that they have footpaths, shops, toilet blocks and playgrounds.” You are really just telling us about the job that you ought to be doing, anyway.

Unfortunately, as has been pointed out by two of the local members here, there are just so many things that you have not talked about that are really important, crucial and at top of mind for many people in Belconnen.

I could touch on crime and safety. I was out at Higgins shops this morning with ABC Radio, talking about a very unfortunate crime episode out there, a little while ago. What about having a station out in west Belconnen—an investigatory study to see whether that would improve the sense of security that people feel when they go to their shopping centres, particularly near Kippax?

The minister has just given us a statement that said, “We are a government who recognises that there are things like footpaths, shopping centres and other things.” Yes, of course; that is your job. It is disappointing—the things that you are not talking about.

With Margaret Timpson Park, we know that that needs to be thought about again. There is the duplication of William Hovell Drive, from Drake-Brockman to John Gorton. For how long have we been hearing about that? Where is the timeframe for actual delivery? We have been hearing about that for years. Where is the timeframe?

This is low on detail. It is a statement saying, “We’re the government. We know we need to look after certain things in our city.” In this case, it is in Belconnen. But it is low on detail, and it is missing some important things that should be talked about.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Regional plans—Gungahlin Ministerial statement

MS CHEYNE (Ginninderra—Manager of Government Business, Attorney-General, Minister for Human Rights, Minister for City and Government Services and Minister for the Night-Time Economy) (11.04): Gungahlin is a relatively new region of the city, but, as we have seen it flourish and develop, we have heard and listened to what additional suburban infrastructure people would like to see. That is why Labor took a practical and strategic plan of investments across the region to the 2024 election. I rise to update the Assembly on the status of the projects and commitments being delivered by the government in the Gungahlin region in order to make it a better place to live and raise a family, based on our regional plan and my portfolio.

Although it seemed to strike a chord yesterday, I do note that the non-Labor members of this place had no input or advocacy that went into the development of our regional plan, and the purpose of these ministerial statements is to update people on the progress in delivering the commitments in those regional plans. Members are welcome to speak about their own advocacy, and we have heard that this morning and yesterday; however, because these are ministerial statements about Labor’s regional plans that Labor members contributed to, they are the ones who will be getting the shout-outs from me.

We do know that one of the most important improvements that we can make for our families is our play spaces and open areas. Across the ACT, playgrounds are being improved, and new play activities are being delivered to provide children of all ages and abilities with fun, creative and engaging play experiences.

Design work is currently underway to construct a new playground at Amaroo shops. Our candidates heard, out in the community, that this was a particularly valued asset and that it would be great to see it upgraded. That is why we have committed to and progressed this work. The playground on Bizant Street will also receive an upgrade to expand play opportunities in the area.

In our nature reserves, our Parks and Conservation Service has delivered the addition of two new walking tracks in Budjan Galindji Grasslands Nature Reserve in Franklin. These tracks improve community access to restored habitats for the golden sun moth, the superb parrot, the striped legless lizard and the world’s largest population of Ginninderra peppercreepers. Upgrades are also occurring along Old Well Station Road in the Nadjung Mada Nature Reserve, with completion anticipated by April this year.

Work commenced in February this year to deliver the next stage of lighting upgrades within the Yerrabi Pond District Park. This next stage of works includes lighting improvements along the path that runs from the corner of Gundaroo Drive and Mirrabai Drive to the Yerrabi Pond outdoor gym. It also includes the installation of lighting on the Eastern Island walkway bridge. I thank Minister Pettersson especially for his

engagement on these upgrades. It has long been true in this place that the first person from whom I hear about Yerrabi Pond issues is Minister Pettersson. His advocacy is both committed and steadfast, and it achieves results.

Families do not all look the same. Some of our children have four legs. That is why a new dog park in Franklin was constructed and it opened to the community in early 2025. That dog park was constructed to provide more spaces for dog owners in Gungahlin to exercise and to socialise their dogs off leash. Minister Orr especially was a significant advocate on behalf of the community to support this new dog park in the region.

Of course, a trip to the dog park is often followed by a trip to the local shops, whether it is for a coffee, groceries or a quick catch-up with neighbours. It is why we committed to upgrades to the Palmerston shops, recognising that this is a local centre that is particularly important for connection as well as convenience. Design is underway for further upgrades at those shops, with public space improvements focusing on increasing safety, access and amenity, which may include footpath improvements, new street furniture, landscaping, lighting and bin shrouds.

Once you have secured your coffee and run into a few neighbours, our goal is to make it as easy as possible for you to make your way home. That is why we are making strategic investments in not only our roads, but also our active travel infrastructure in Gungahlin. Several studies have been completed for Gungahlin town centre improvements, including intersection safety, walking, cycling and other forms of active travel which are at the centre of the ACT government's plans to make Canberra an even more livable and sustainable city.

This work is part of improving opportunities for active travel, as well as road safety and access in the Gungahlin town centre. Work has progressed on feasibility and design work for intersection upgrades at the Hinder Street and Efkarpidis Street intersection, and the Manning Clark-Anthony Rolfe intersection. Design work has also been completed on priority active travel links within the town centre.

We will continue to improve Gungahlin's road network under the Gungahlin Road improvements project, jointly funded with the commonwealth government. We will investigate intersection upgrades and road widening along Gungahlin Drive, from Gundaroo Drive through to Overall Avenue in Casey, to improve traffic flow. We will also work on a corridor plan for Mirrabei Drive to guide future improvements.

Design work has been progressing for active travel infrastructure along the Barton Highway connecting to Hall Village. This project has developed design options for a new walking and cycling path from Victoria Street in Hall, along the Barton Highway and past Clarrie Hermes Drive, finishing at the start of the dedicated C7 cycle path at Edie Payne Street. The commonwealth has committed funding towards construction of this link under the federal Active Transport Fund.

I spoke earlier about having completed the duplication of Gundaroo Drive, and I note that that road is just as important for Gungahlin residents as it is for those of Belconnen.

I am proud to be a member of a team that took a practical and targeted program of works to the election, very transparently, very visibly, and it is one that we are working

through and have already delivered on. I look forward to continuing to work with Ministers Orr and Pettersson to deliver these important and meaningful upgrades for the people of Gungahlin to make the region an even better place to live.

I present the following paper:

Update on Gungahlin Regional Plan—Ministerial statement, 25 March 2026.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (11.11): I thank the minister for her update and a Labor love-fest in her ministerial statement. I would also like to thank her because it gave me an enlightening opportunity to go back through my email sent box over the past year or so to see what I have been working on in the past year within the Gungahlin area. I will keep this, as the minister has clarified, to the scope of just her areas of interest. I would also note that we will be having a protracted debate this afternoon on the Gungahlin district.

Some of the work that I have been advocating for includes the Yerrabi Pond environment, including wildlife and water quality, secure bike storage for the Gungahlin town centre, safer streets in numerous suburbs, including Casey, Taylor and Franklin, numerous repairs to public infrastructure, concerns about the Gungahlin Leisure Centre, illegal dumping—so much illegal dumping—traffic signals in the Gungahlin town centre, and bike path missing links, to ensure that we have a connected network. A lot of this is the bread-and-butter advocacy for constituencies, which is the important part of democracy at work.

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) (11.12): I would like to thank the minister for her update. Noting, as Mr Braddock pointed out, that we will have a bit more of a discussion about Gungahlin later this afternoon, I will keep my remarks somewhat short—but perhaps not, because I really like my electorate and I get quite excited when I talk about it.

In the last election, Labor had a really good and, in my opinion, focused plan for the things that we had heard throughout the term—my colleague Mr Pettersson and I in particular—as to what our community would really like to see progressed. Certainly, while the ministerial statement focuses particularly on the things in Ms Cheyne’s portfolio, those things are really important to our community. We are in a somewhat new area, although I think we are getting into our teenage years; we are no longer in our infancy.

We want continually to look at those community facilities in particular, and I thank the minister for her work on things like the Franklin dog park, which is forever busy and full. Even when there is a storm warning in place, I will go past it and see people still in there, playing, and I think, “No, go home. There’s a storm warning.” We can see how much it has been embraced by everyone. I get lots of really good, positive feedback,

not just about how appreciated it is, but about how much it is enlivening our community, with people coming into the area with their dogs, making connections and friendships with the owners of the dogs, and strengthening our community through that involvement.

The other one that has been quite exciting has been the Budjan Galindji Nature Reserve, and seeing that come into its own, with the opening of the paths, the fencing and the sites where you can go in and interact with the nature reserve. Certainly, watching the community go on this journey, from everyone thinking that this was a future development site to coming to appreciate that it is a very valuable ecosystem, and interacting with what that entails, has been a true testament to how working with the community, with the environment groups such as Friends of Grasslands, and with the government can start to raise awareness of the important ecosystems within our city and how they can continue to enliven our community, while still supporting the environment.

There are heaps of playgrounds. Everyone always wants more playgrounds. We are seeing quite a few being provided. The Amaroo one will be fantastic. I know Mr Pettersson has done a lot of work with the community on this one. Certainly, it is one on which we get a huge amount of feedback, in that people would really like a place to play. I am looking forward to continuing to advocate with him on this.

As far as roads are concerned, and active travel, there is a lot there. In taking forward the commitments that we took forward, and that Minister Cheyne continues to progress, it was about looking at where we could best target the focus, without disrupting the system to the point where people get a little bit upset that they cannot travel anywhere. I think we have a good balance there, and I am very keen to see these continue to progress. I am keen to work with the minister on those, particularly around those main arterial roads and looking to see how we can support particularly the north of Gungahlin, which will be done through a number of these upgrades. Again, I think that the minister is very focused on this, and I am very encouraged by her diligence in putting these forward.

I will leave my remarks there. I will not refer to the town centre because we will focus on that this afternoon, thanks to Mr Braddock's motion. It is great to see this. Hopefully, we will have more days when we get to talk about how wonderful Yerrabi is.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

ACT Youth Week 2026

Ministerial statement

MR PETTERSSON (Yerrabi—Minister for Business, Arts and Creative Industries, Minister for Children, Youth and Families, Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Minister for Skills, Training and Industrial Relations) (11.16): As Minister for Children, Youth and Families, I welcome the opportunity to talk more about the exciting events we have coming up in relation to youth affairs and to reflect on the vital role young people play in shaping our community.

Next week, I will have the immense pleasure of opening the ACT Youth Assembly,

which, following the success of previous events, I have asked the ACT government to deliver annually. The 2026 ACT Youth Assembly will be held on 31 March at the new CIT campus in Woden and is expected to bring together up to 100 young people to explore issues they identified as most urgent: discrimination and community safety. This is one of our flagship engagement initiatives, co-designed and led by the ACT Youth Advisory Council, with support from the ACT Office for Youth Engagement in the Health and Community Services Directorate. It aims to create genuine opportunities for young people to not just share their thoughts but also turn those thoughts into practical, actionable feedback for the ACT government.

The 2025 assembly report served to inform key policy and service design processes by identifying emerging issues, reflecting how young people actually used and understood existing supports, and presenting youth-driven proposals that enabled the government to pursue more informed decision-making about responsive and equitable initiatives. Together, these contributions ensured that the voices of young people were not only heard but also shaped the government's ongoing commitment to strengthening outcomes for our community. I look forward to hearing the views of young people from the 2026 assembly.

Just after the Youth Assembly, we get to let our hair down just a bit and really celebrate young people during ACT Youth Week. ACT Youth Week is always a highlight in the calendar. It is a time when we recognise the energy, creativity and leadership of young Canberrans aged 12 to 25. This year's ACT Youth Week runs from 14 to 24 April and once again offers opportunities for young people to connect, express themselves and be celebrated for the many ways they enrich our community.

The ACT government has committed \$30,000 to make sure this week is a success. Through partnerships with local businesses and youth services, hundreds of young people will have the opportunity to participate in free and inclusive activities that they otherwise may not be able to. The ACT government will be providing \$10,000 to support vulnerable young people to visit the National Zoo and BOUNCE Belconnen. I am really looking forward to joining in on some trampolining.

This year, the ACT government will also partner with services to support them with \$20,000 worth of grants to offer events that will be meaningful to their community members. These could include going to the movies, tenpin bowling, minigolf, ice skating or visiting Questacon. These experiences are designed to ensure that young people have the opportunity to participate and feel valued, regardless of their background or circumstance.

Each year, ACT Youth Week also shines a light on the diversity of Canberra's young people, reflected vividly in the work of the ACT Youth Advisory Council. Later in the year, I look forward to announcing new members of the council. I will get to work closely with them as they bring new energy and ideas. The council is an essential voice in shaping policies and programs that meet the needs of all, and they make a wonderful contribution to the ACT government.

The Youth Advisory Council is responsible for hosting our Young Canberra Citizen of the Year Awards, which recognise and celebrate the achievements of young people in the ACT. Last year's award ceremony was a reminder of the incredible contribution

young people make to the ACT every day. I wish I had been as passionate as they are at their age to change Canberra for the better. The most recent Young Canberra Citizen of the Year winner was Peter Harris, a young Wiradjuri man, cultural leader and youth mental health advocate. Peter is co-designing the ACT's first Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Youth Mental Health Service Model and contributed to establishing Canberra's first Aboriginal Community Controlled Suicide Prevention Service.

Our service system is continuing to adapt and change in response to research, oversight reviews and issues impacting young people today. Our Children, Youth and Families division in the Health Community Services Directorate is undertaking significant reform, with greater emphasis on targeted supports for young people that may be at risk of increased vulnerability or at risk of engaging in offending behaviour. This government has also funded and established the innovative Therapeutic Support Panel as a lead response to raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility.

To all the young people in the ACT: thank you. Your ideas, your courage and your passion make our community stronger. Whether you are contributing through the ACT Youth Assembly, participating in ACT Youth Week activities, creating art, advocating for change or supporting your peers, you are helping build a more connected, inclusive and forward-looking Canberra. And to our partners—the youth workers, government and community organisations, families, educators, oversight bodies and advocates, and the Youth Advisory Council: thank you for being there for young people so they feel respected, welcomed and heard.

As a government, we remain deeply committed to ensuring young people have a seat at every table where decisions about their lives are made. Your insights shape our policies, your experiences guide our work, and your leadership inspires us all.

I present the following paper:

ACT Youth Week 2026—Ministerial statement, 25 March 2026.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (11.23): I thank the minister for his statement. I too am extremely excited for the Youth Assembly and Youth Week. I might be a bit crap at Googling, because I could not find a list of events for the upcoming Youth Week yet, but I look forward to hearing more about the events my constituents will be able to enjoy later in April, and I think that the minister is going to have an absolute blast at BOUNCE.

Youth Week is incredibly valuable, especially in a city where the places that young people can hang out for free in a safe, accessible and climate controlled venue without being judged or feeling unwelcome are becoming few and far between. Sorry, but a bit of a rant is inbound: while the minister's points are good and exciting, they will not be as meaningful until the ACT Labor government follows through on the things that young people actually ask them to do.

A dominant theme, when we talk about youth engagement here in parliament, is that we are always saying we are worried about how many young people are disengaging from politics. They are far more likely to disengage if they do not feel listened to. I have been privileged recently to have some great conversations with the youth parliamentarians from the ACT Youth Parliament, run by the Y. Succession planning is looking up, guys; these young people are brilliant. Reflecting on those conversations, common themes were young people's sharp ability to see through token engagement, and their desire to be treated like political thinkers, like the rest of us. A really powerful tool, then, that we, as a parliament, have for youth engagement is government follow-through. When young people ask us to do something, we tell them whether we can do it. If we cannot, we explain why. If we can, we do it.

Let's look at what the last Youth Assembly asked the government to do and whether the government has done it. I think the government's response to the last Youth Assembly report in 2025 was a bit woeful, frankly. Across the board, the government's response to the Youth Assembly tends to come across as more concerned with defending what they are already doing, rather than acknowledging that young people would not be making these recommendations unless the status quo was not good enough to begin with.

I will not go through all the recommendations, but I will focus on the education section. The Youth Assembly's first recommendation was for government to invest in teaching resources that deliver consistent education in civics, financial literacy and career pathways, with the delivery of these resources being a mandatory requirement in the school curriculum. The government's response is that civics, financial literacy and career education are supported within the ACT curriculum. Well, sure, but clearly young people want more of it. That is a common theme we see through things like the Tuggeranong Community Council's youth survey. Young people actually want an education system that feels like it prepares them for the world that they are going to face.

I am particularly interested in the fact that there is no requirement for civics education in years 11 and 12 right now. I appreciate that is largely an issue for the curriculum, but, in years 11 and 12, a lot of young people expect to be able to vote for the first time. We do not control the curriculum, but our education system should absolutely be responsive to what young people want to learn about. The Youth Assembly also asked the government to implement mandatory diversity and inclusion training. The first line of the response from government is: "The ACT government has an ongoing commitment to inclusive education." Awesome. Good. What does that actually mean? Young people would not be asking for this if they thought the government's current offerings were good enough, based on their experience in the education system.

They asked the government to increase funding for all ACT high schools to employ at least one dedicated career advisor to enhance support for students' career development and facilitate a smoother transition into college, vocational training or employment. Strangely enough, this is also exactly what the ACT careers advisors are asking for. I would like to thank Jo and the ACT Careers Association for trusting me to sponsor their petition—which is still live, so sign it—calling for the government to consider this very same ask. These are the things our young people—the Youth Advisory Council—asked the government to act on, and, by looking at this list, I cannot be sure that these things

are really happening.

The government response to the 2025 Youth Assembly report does not say whether the government agrees, agrees in principle, notes or disagrees. That is a departure from previous government responses that did. This muddies the lines of accountability. The young people, whom we asked to put a lot of time and effort into these recommendations, deserve to know whether the government actually agrees with the recommendations and whether they plan to do anything differently.

I am very happy to be corrected on this, but nowhere in the government's response did I observe that they said, "You know what? That's a good point, and here's what we are going to change to make things better." With hand on my heart, I do not mean this as a political cheap shot—I do not think this is the right area to make political cheap shots: I think the minister genuinely cares about youth engagement and is open to feedback. At the very least, I am hoping that, in the response to the next Youth Assembly, the government return to the practice of saying whether they agree to Youth Assembly recommendations and what they are going to do about it.

When we asked the minister about his government's obligation to follow up on whether Youth Assembly recommendations had been implemented by the government back in the 2023-24 annual reports hearings early last year, the minister and his officials said that it was actually the responsibility of the Ministerial Youth Advisory Council to hold the government accountable and track progress across Youth Assembly recommendations. I appreciate why they might need to do that, but it does not quite seem fair to me. I do not think that the Youth Advisory Council is resourced to track whole-of-government responses. That is not what tends to happen for other things that require whole-of-government responses. At the very least, I think it undermines the Youth Advisory Council's ability to bring a proactive agenda to the minister in true youth-led design.

I also want to briefly get on the record that it is a shame that non-government members do not get a chance to listen to the Ministerial Youth Advisory Council and all the brilliant things they have to say. We would like to hear from them directly. I appreciate that this is a decision of the minister that should only be taken with the blessing of the council, so, while I will not be able to tell them this directly, I would like to congratulate the forthcoming new members of the Youth Advisory Council in advance and thank the previous members who have given so much time and energy to improving this city for young people. MindMap, which is a result of consultation with young people a few years ago, is an excellent program.

To conclude—this is a bit heavy, but it bears repeating at every opportunity that we have—it is so hard to be a young person right now. We may never be able to afford a house like previous generations could. We may not have a safe and liveable climate. My generation—and the people who come after us—have been hit hard by the cost of living. That may include a HECS debt and overpriced, undermaintained student accommodation or the \$7,000 to \$10,000 that apprentices need to pay for their own tools—I did not realise how expensive that is—alongside the car that they have to keep running, during a fuel crisis, mind you. It is bad.

Students going through school now are staring down the barrel of AI—a technology

that could be used to better treat cancer but is instead being monetised to possibly take their jobs, deeply undermine their and their friends' mental health, and cause our world to doubt the information before our very eyes. If the policies we make across the whole of government do not reflect young people's lived reality, they will lose faith in politics at a time when hope and their engagement is most needed.

We have a responsibility in this place to listen to young people. We need to make our initiatives meaningful and we need government to follow through when young people tell us to act. We have the opportunity to draw a hopeful, politically engaged generation into the fold. We just need to listen to them. So, ahead of the Youth Assembly in March, Youth Week in April and the inauguration of the new Ministerial Youth Advisory Council, I urge the government to properly respond, not just through words but also through action, to what young people are telling us they need.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Canberra Institute of Technology—chief executive officer—order to table documents

MS CHEYNE (Ginninderra—Manager of Government Business, Attorney-General, Minister for Human Rights, Minister for City and Government Services and Minister for the Night-Time Economy) (11.31): I move:

That order of the day No 1, Assembly business, relating to the production of documents relating to the recruitment of CIT CEO pursuant to standing order 213A and the Assembly resolution of 24 March 2026, be postponed until a later hour this day.

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) (11.32): For the benefit of members, in the hours since the Assembly agreed to that 213A, the government has been working to produce the documents. They are not yet ready. We believe they will be ready for today, though.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Debate adjourned to a later hour.

ACT Ambulance Service—station closures—order to table documents

MRS MORRIS (Brindabella) (11.32): I move:

That, in accordance with standing order 213A, the Assembly orders the Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services to provide the Assembly with:

- (1) a complete list of all ambulance station closure events since 11 April 2024, including the date, start and end time, station name, duration of closure and the stated reason for closure;

- (2) the details of any incident reviews or investigations undertaken in relation to incidents that occurred within the ACT during a closure period; and
- (3) any briefs that relate to incidents of actual or potential patient harm which occurred within the ACT during a closure period, with patient identification removed.

Canberrans should be able to trust that, when they call for an ambulance service, help is on the way. That is a very basic expectation. A health emergency does not wait for a convenient hour. It does not wait until a shift is fully staffed or until the roster gap is filled. It strikes when it strikes, and in those moments Canberrans expect their ambulance service is ready to respond. But there is a growing crisis that is injuring our paramedics and placing the lives of Canberrans at risk, and that is the consistent understaffing and subsequent closure of ambulance stations in Canberra.

Our paramedics and staff carry an enormous burden on behalf of this community. They walk into uncertainty every day and they do so with professionalism, competence, compassion and a deep sense of duty. Much is asked of them because the stakes could not be higher. When we talk about the health of our ambulance service, staffing levels and station closures, we are talking about matters pertaining to life and death for the people of Canberra. People's lives and wellbeing depend on the service that our ambos provide. That is why it is critically important that they have the tools that they need to get on with their life-saving work, and that is exactly why this Assembly must take seriously any evidence that the system around them is not functioning as it should.

We already know there have been serious pressures on our ambulance service. As officials revealed to me in response to questions during annual reports hearings last year, ambulance stations were closed on six separate occasions, totalling 38 hours of lost coverage in October 2025, and that was due to staff shortages. We also know from the roster review that, after implementation of the 44-hour roster, the percentage of shifts below minimum crewing increased from an average of 31 per cent to 67 per cent, and that the average percentage of night shifts below minimum crewing increased from 38 per cent to 96 per cent. The new roster was designed to fix all of our ambulance workforce pressures. While the transition to the roster was welcomed and supported by the service, inaction—the government's failure to adequately resource the roster and plan for its transition—has taken us backwards.

These are not minor pressures. These are warning lights flashing that we must pay attention to, and that is exactly why I lodged the freedom of information request. We must know the impact that understaffing is having, because the lives and the wellbeing of people in our community depend on it. When stations are closed and shifts run below minimum, it is not an abstract workforce management problem; it is a public safety issue. And it raises very simple and very serious questions: what happened during those periods when ambulance stations were forced to close; what happened to those Canberrans who called 000 for help when an ambulance station was closed? That is what this order seeks to answer.

This order seeks historical data to make sure all facts are on the table. It is not an excessive request and it is not unreasonable; it is a measured and responsible request for information that goes to the heart of this Assembly's oversight role. The Assembly has previously compelled the minister to report quarterly on closures and ambulance

service pressures going forward, and I look forward to the minister's update to the Assembly on that tomorrow.

I note that, in recent weeks, the ACT Ambulance Service has welcomed new paramedics to the team, both graduates and lateral transfers. On behalf of the Canberra Liberals, I extend to those paramedics a warm welcome and thank them for their invaluable service to our community. It is most important that they are looked after so that they can get on with their life-saving work, because our community depends on their service.

Governments are often very quick to assure the public that everything is under control. We have previously been assured by the government that no Canberran has been without care as a result of understaffing and station closures. If that is so—and we all hope that is so—there should be no difficulty in producing the documents that we are asking for today. This motion is a call for transparency. If the government maintains that closures do not affect care, these documents will help to demonstrate that. If the government says systems were in place to manage the risk, these documents will help the Assembly to assess whether those systems worked. And, if there were incidents of actual or potential harm, this Assembly has a duty to understand that fact, because our first obligation must always be the safety of the public and the frontline workers asked to carry out the consequences of system failure.

This order is important for another reason: frontline paramedics should not be left to carry the moral burden of these pressures in silence while the government asks the Assembly and the public to look the other way. The evidence already before us suggests that the workforce has been under extraordinary strain. In a previous debate on ambulance pressures, I raised concerns shared with me by a paramedic, not only about station closures and understaffing but also about the moral injury that they experience and is caused when staff know they cannot get to everyone as quickly as they should, because of shortages and a lack of resourcing. That is a deeply profound thing for a frontline worker to say—for a frontline worker to come to a member of the opposition and share their grief and the moral injury that they are experiencing because this government is not adequately resourcing their service. It ought to command the serious attention of every member in this place.

Supporting this order does not amount to prejudging every quota and it does not amount to blaming any individual officers or staff. Quite the opposite: it recognises that, when frontline workers are operating under pressure, transparency matters even more, facts matter more and honest scrutiny matters more, because, without that, lessons are not learned, risks are not addressed and public confidence is not restored. The Assembly cannot do its job if it is denied the information needed to understand what on earth has happened.

This order is careful, it is proportionate and it is directed to matters of very obvious public importance. It asks for the facts, and it does so in a way that protects patient privacy while allowing this Assembly to perform its proper role. Canberrans deserve confidence that their ambulance service is available when they need it and our paramedics deserve a system that supports them properly. This Assembly deserves the documents necessary to assess whether that is, in fact, occurring. We eagerly await the minister's update this week on what action has been taken in response to the previous

motion that was passed in this place.

I thank the minister's office and also Mr Braddock's office for their engagement with my office on this issue. I trust that we have landed on an agreed position. I am grateful for that and I thank you for that. I will let you speak to the amendments shortly. I commend the order to the Assembly.

DR PATERSON (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services, Minister for Women, Minister for the Prevention of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence, Minister for Corrections and Minister for Gaming Reform) (11.43): I would like to thank Mrs Morris for allowing, through this motion, a discussion about our ACT Ambulance Service. It never ceases to amaze me how Mrs Morris continues to attack our emergency service personnel and undermine community confidence in our ambulance.

Canberrans can absolutely have confidence in our Ambulance Service. ACTAS has continued to deliver some of the best response times in the country for life-threatening cases, as well as very, very high levels of patient satisfaction. This is absolutely an excessive request for documentation. Do not be mistaken Mrs Morris: this request for documents will have a significant impact on resources.

Demand for our Ambulance Service is at the highest levels ever. In the last financial year, ACTAS received 67,425 emergency triple-zero calls, which is up 7.8 per cent from the previous year. The recent review of the ACTAS roster demonstrated that, similar to ambulance services worldwide, it is operating under sustained pressure due to growing community demand and a rise in low-acuity cases. The dedication and professionalism of our paramedics should be highly commended, as they continue to provide life-saving services to members of the community who may be experiencing the worst day of their life.

I refer to the request in the motion to provide “... a complete list of all station closure events since 11 April 2024, including the date, start and end time, station name, duration of closure, and the stated reason for closure”. I am advised by the ACT Emergency Services Agency, that this information can be compiled and provided within 60 business days, which is why that is part of the amendments that I have circulated.

However, as noted in the ACTAS roster review report, resourcing is stretched, and this 213A will significantly impact staffing and divert resourcing and efforts from the frontline in supporting our community. ACTAS staff have already spent significant time on recent, very similar, freedom of information requests: the JACS 2025-360 documents related to “the minimum service level or target for stretched ambulance availability, and communications regarding the availability being below that level”; as well as JACS 2026-366 documents “relating to any temporary or partial closure of ACT ambulance stations since June 2025”, the documentation for which is now publicly available through the Justice and Community Safety Directorate disclosure log.

Further, information on station closures has been requested and provided via several questions on notice from the Assembly and its committees. ACTAS staff have also been committed to producing quarterly reports as required by the Assembly resolution that passed on 2 December 2025. The first of these quarterly reports for the period 1 January

to 31 March 2026, which will include details on the same type of information being sought in this latest motion, will soon be publicly available on the ESA website.

I would note that every single one of Mrs Morris's requests is a slightly different request, so it requires ACTAS staff to go back within the framing—whether it is a timeframe or a specific definition of whatever Mrs Morris's requests are. This requires continued attention. It is not just repeating and continually distributing the information.

Ambulance station closures are not uncommon in the ACT, or in other jurisdictions in Australia or around the world. When a station closure is required for any reason, ACTAS has a robust set of protocols in place for business continuity. These actions and decision points are outlined in a standard operating procedure titled *Roster and Deployment Procedure (Crewing Levels and Capability Maintenance)*. This is one of several documents that has already been made available through the freedom of information requests. The document clearly outlines shift guidance, shift coverage actions and the coverage matrix based on the scenarios that may confront our ambulance officers.

In the ACT, ACTAS resources are strategically spread across nine stations: in Dickson, Belconnen, Woden, Calwell, Fyshwick, Gungahlin, Greenway, West Belconnen and Acton. Ideally, we would like to staff all nine stations all the time; however, if a station is not open for a matter of hours, that does not mean that one part of Canberra is not covered by ACTAS resources. ACTAS responds to jobs dynamically and often not from the station where paramedics started their shift.

Unlike Fire & Rescue, which responds to incidents from fixed stations, ACTAS operates as a mobile service. Ambulances are dispatched from wherever crews are located at the time, which is mostly at the hospital, but they can be on the road or returning from a previous job. As a result, the closest available ambulance is not necessarily based at the nearest ambulance station.

While interest in station closures and minimum crewing levels is understandable, those factors do not directly reflect the service delivery. For this reason, station location and minimum crewing levels are not used as key performance indicators for ambulance services in any Australian jurisdiction. Ambulance services are judged by the number of calls for assistance, their response times to life-threatening situations, and, of course, patient satisfaction. These are reflected in the *Report on government services* and in the Council of Ambulance Authorities' Patient Experience Survey. As I said earlier, despite the growing demand, ACTAS has continued to record some of the best response times in the country for life-threatening cases, as well as high levels of patient satisfaction.

When ACTAS is aware that at times—and usually for a period of a few hours in the middle of the night—there are insufficient staffing levels to resource all nine stations, all efforts are made to backfill the rostered shifts. This includes offering overtime or requesting staff move from day shift to night shift. These attempts are not always successful.

I am assured by the Chief Officer of the ACT Ambulance Service that if a member of the Canberra community calls for an ambulance in a life-threatening situation, they can have complete confidence in ACTAS's ability to respond. Our ACTAS staff are

incredibly hardworking, highly skilled individuals who provide quality health care to the community.

I can also assure our ACTAS workforce that the ACT government will continue to support them, and we remain focused on their health and wellbeing as we continue to deliver on community expectations.

I have circulated amendments to Mrs Morris's motion. Again, I would like to thank Mrs Morris and her staff for the work on this and Mr Braddock for engaging in these amendments.

I move:

Omit all text after paragraph (1), substitute:

- “(2) the details of any incident reviews, investigations, or briefs, in relation to any incidents, or suspected incidents, where actual or potential patient harm occurred in the ACT during the closure of a station and not limited to the region of the closed station, with patient and staff identification removed; and
- (3) notwithstanding provisions of standing order 213A, material is to be provided within 60 business days.”.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (11.50): I rise in support of this order for production of documents. It is abundantly clear that our Ambulance Service is facing systemic and sustained pressures, primarily through increased demand from the community. As such, I look forward to seeing the report-back on Thursday. Given the strain on our Ambulance Service, it is critical that this Assembly is equipped with clear, detailed and transparent information.

In particular, I am interested in the prevalence of single-operator vehicles, which remains opaque in the current reporting. Our present reporting does not adequately distinguish whether stations are staffed by full ambulance crews or single-operator vehicles. A standard ambulance requires two paramedics to transport a patient, whereas a single-operator vehicle cannot fulfil that function. That is not to diminish the vital role these units play. They are an essential part of the system, providing a rapid response and critical support in time-pressured situations. However, they are not a substitute for patient-transport capable crews.

My concern is that describing services as simply “operational” without clarifying their patient-carrying capacity obscures the true picture of workforce capability. Without this level of detail, we risk misunderstanding the extent of the strain on the system and, in turn, undermine effective workforce planning. This is one of the reasons why the order for production of documents is important: it will help reveal the true dimensions of the challenges at hand and inform a more sustainable path forward.

I note the minister's concerns about the shadow minister's request for information. I also note that Labor and the Liberals have negotiated an agreed amended scope to the 213A motion, and hence the minister is obviously comfortable with that scope.

We support the intent of this order for production of documents and stand ready to work towards providing practical solutions that safeguard our frontline workers and the

community that depends on them.

MRS MORRIS (Brindabella) (11.53): Once again, I want to reiterate my thanks to the minister's office and Mr Braddock for their support. This is a very important transparency measure, and it goes to the health and wellbeing of our frontline ambulance paramedics but also, importantly, to community safety.

I would note that it is pretty extraordinary that the minister is blaming the opposition for staffing pressures and for the workload of our Ambulance Service. That is extraordinary; you cannot make this stuff up! It is the ACT government's responsibility to adequately resource our Ambulance Service: that is their job. It is their job to resource them and to ensure they have the funding they need so that we have a healthy, functioning Ambulance Service.

And what is their record? Well, before the transition to the new roster, it was identified that about 60-odd new paramedics would be required to implement that change, and at the point of transition they funded about 15-odd. They later introduced additional funding, but obviously not enough. Last year when the roster review was handed down, they then identified that they needed an additional 80-odd paramedics to fill the roster, so the problem had clearly gotten worse. And only a few weeks ago when the FOI documents, which I obtained, made it into the public space, we were then being told, "Well, actually we need about 100 paramedics to sustain this new roster."

So clearly the government has fallen behind. They have been playing catch-up from the beginning. It is like an episode of *Utopia*. For the minister to come and say today, "Oh, it's the opposition's fault because of the staffing pressures," is extraordinary! I think if the ACT government just focuses on doing their job, it would be of benefit to the whole Canberra community.

We, the opposition, will continue to do our job, which is to scrutinise this government, and that is exactly what we are doing here in the chamber today. Notwithstanding that commentary from the minister, I am grateful that we have landed on a shared position on this, and we look forward to those documents. Thank you.

Amendment agreed to.

Question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Transport and City Services—Standing Committee Report 1

MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi) (11.55): I present the following report:

Transport and City Services—Standing Committee—Report 1—*Can We Fix It? Report of the inquiry into the effectiveness of Fix My Street*, dated 12 March 2026, together with extracts of the relevant minutes of proceedings.

I move:

That the report be noted.

I rise to table the Standing Committee on Transport and City Services Inquiry into the effectiveness of Fix My Street. This is the committee's first report for the Eleventh Assembly.

This inquiry was commenced by the Standing Committee on Environment, Planning, Transport and City Services on 29 May 2025. On 26 June 2025, when the Assembly amended the 3 December 2024 resolution establishing standing committees, this inquiry was transferred to the Standing Committee on Transport and City Services.

The inquiry received 59 submissions, held two public hearings, and received a demonstration from City and Environment Directorate officials on the back-end functions of Fix My Street.

This inquiry has shown that the redesign and remediation project resulted in improvements to the functionality of Fix My Street, which is the subject of the committee's one finding. The committee also makes five recommendations, which relate to the Fix My Street continuous improvement program currently underway.

On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank all Canberrans who took the time to write submissions and appear at hearings for this inquiry. Their contributions inspired the committee's inquiry into the provision of municipal services and will be taken into consideration for that inquiry's report. The committee also thanks the Minister for City and Government Services and her officials for their open engagement. We truly had a really good inquiry.

I would like to thank my fellow committee members for their collegiate approach to this inquiry and the secretariat for making everything run so smoothly, and especially for our report title. I love the creativity. Can we fix it? Apparently, the government can.

Ms Cheyne: That's the nicest thing you've ever said!

MS CASTLEY: I commend the report to the Assembly.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

City and Environment Legislation Amendment Bill 2026

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

Title read by Clerk.

MS CHEYNE (Ginninderra—Manager of Government Business, Attorney-General, Minister for Human Rights, Minister for City and Government Services and Minister for the Night-Time Economy) (11.58): I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

I am pleased to present the City and Environment Legislation Amendment Bill 2026

today. It is an omnibus bill that makes a range of minor and technical amendments to laws within my portfolio as Minister for City and Government Services, as well as in my capacity as Attorney-General. The bill makes amendments to the Cemeteries and Crematoria Act 2020, the Electoral Act 1992, the Heavy Vehicle National Law Act (ACT) 2013, the Road Transport (Offences) Regulation 2005, and the Road Transport (Safety and Traffic Management) Regulation 2017.

The diversity in the subject matter of these amendments reflects the range of important work across the City and Environment Directorate and the Justice and Community Safety Directorate. These amendments will ensure that the laws governing the work of the ACT government are up to date and reflect the community's expectations. The most substantive amendments are to the Cemeteries and Crematoria Act 2020, ensuring the requirements for notification, collection and retention of cremated remains are clear for crematorium licensees.

Grief is deeply personal. It permanently changes you, and the life administration that is required when a person dies is considerable. Families deserve certainty, compassion and respect as they navigate an immensely difficult time. At this point in this introductory speech—I am already emotional—I sincerely thank Felicity Prideaux for her advocacy. I welcome her presence in the chamber and express my gratitude for being able to share her story and Rob's story.

Felicity reached out to me last November to share her experience. Felicity's husband, Rob, died last year. Felicity lives outside the ACT, in a wonderful neighbourhood with wonderful neighbours and friends, but the closest crematorium facilities are in the ACT. Rob was cremated at Norwood Park. Understandably, Felicity wanted Rob home with her as soon as possible after the cremation occurred. She did not want Rob to be away for any longer than he needed to be. She waited for the call, the notification. She was ready to collect the cremated remains as soon as she got that call. That call never came. Felicity did not forget. How could she possibly forget? But the fog of grief is real. A loved one's death is so deeply affecting, and working through the processes after someone dies is an occasional thing for the vast majority of us. Not many of us are well-versed in the machinations and procedures of a crematorium or a funeral service. It is not a surprise—in fact, it is perfectly understandable—that Felicity thought there was simply a good reason for the time it was taking for her to be notified.

It was not until many weeks later that a conversation with the funeral director—on receipt of Rob's death certificate—alerted Felicity that the cremated remains should well and truly be available for collection. Felicity called the facility. The cremated remains were ready for collection—in fact, they had been ready for some time—and Felicity went straight there.

Let me be clear that the facility failed Rob and it failed Felicity. It compounded already immense grief, making her feel that she had not fulfilled Rob's wishes, because of lax business practice. Any family going through this process rightfully expects that they would be notified as soon as the cremated remains are available. It does not mean that the family has to immediately collect them, but it gives them the information that they need to decide when to collect them, at a time that is right for them. For Felicity and Rob, the time was immediately. When Felicity asked the facility's management about what had occurred, the explanation was woeful. The legislation was blamed.

I accept that the relevant part of the legislation reads ambiguously, but legislation needs to be read in context. This means provisions of the act must be read in the context of the act as a whole. One of the key objects of the act is to recognise the rights of people to dignified and respectful treatment of their human remains and the human remains of their loved ones. It is perfectly acceptable that a reasonable person would expect that alerting the family that a loved one's remains are available to collect when the family is ready to do so is dignified and respectful, but failing to do so is not.

This point is particularly stark when the same legislation applies to the Gungahlin crematorium, yet the Gungahlin crematorium, as a matter of course, notifies the family within one week. So it is clear the legislation is not an impediment, but, regardless, we can strengthen the community's expectations without creating a burden for crematorium licensees. So, by January, we had updated the code of conduct for our crematoriums and reflected our expectation about the notification timeframe being one week—seven days. Our two crematoriums were notified of this change.

Today we are enshrining that expectation in the primary legislation. Minor amendments with a profound purpose are intended to safeguard the dignified storage and handling of cremated remains and to prevent situations where uncertainty or miscommunication can compound a family's loss. They are designed to ensure that crematorium licensees do not exacerbate the immense pain that family and friends are experiencing. This bill amends section 25 of the act to establish a legal requirement that a licensee must notify an applicant that cremated remains are available for collection within seven days of a completed cremation. It is a blunt measure. It is a blunt measure that we clearly need to make to ensure that industry is responsive and respectful to the experience of family and friends.

We understand that there are many things that might cause a short delay in notification, so we must respect that. There certainly was a consideration of "as soon as the cremated remains are available", but seven days seems to be most reasonable in all of the circumstances. To facilitate this obligation, there have also been composite amendments to establish an offence and to update recordkeeping provisions in line with the new required actions. If licensees fail to comply with their obligations, the offence attracts 20 penalty units.

After Felicity and I spoke on radio this morning, I was dismayed but not surprised to learn that a large number of people were contacting the station and saying that Felicity and Rob's experience had been their experience too. Today we cut this poor business practice out at the root and we make sure that this does not happen to another person without consequence. These changes are a direct result of Felicity's experience and advocacy. The coda to this, which I have many emotions about, is that, when the manager blamed the legislation, Felicity said, "I'm going to do something about it." The manager expressed cynicism that a change would be achieved. Respectfully, he clearly did not know Felicity, and he clearly does not know me.

I cannot change Felicity's experience, but Felicity and I can change the experiences of others. I deeply hope that the memory of this terrible, traumatic experience, made worse by Norwood's poor business practices, is replaced with this memory. I expect that Rob is cheering and Rob is not surprised at Felicity's achievement. Through you, Madam

Assistant Speaker, thank you, Felicity. Thank you for sharing your experience with me and trusting that reform is possible. I truly hope that this is a reminder for everyone in the community that change is possible.

The bill also makes a minor but very significant amendment to the Electoral Act 1992. This is about implementing recommendation 3 of the ACT Electoral Commission's report on the ACT Legislative Assembly election of 2024. This change will bring forward the commencement of public consultation on the redistribution of electoral boundaries to 25 months prior to each ordinary election instead of the existing 24 months. Redistribution is fundamental to ensuring fair representation, and this amendment guarantees that Canberrans—from individuals to community organisations—have the time and the opportunity to engage meaningfully in this process. By acting promptly on the Electoral Commission's recommendation, we are reinforcing our commitment to independent institutions and to electoral integrity—values that sit at the heart of our democratic system.

I thank the Standing Committee on the Integrity Commission and Statutory Office Holders for their understanding of the timing imperative of this matter and for releasing the interim report of their inquiry into the operation of the 2024 ACT election and the Electoral Act 1992. I acknowledge that 25 months before the 2028 ACT election is September this year. In an attempt to provide Elections ACT and the commissioner with certainty about when they will be able to begin consultation, we have brought forward this amendment as early as we were able to.

The next amendment this bill makes will remove an obsolete reference to a now-repealed “mistake of fact” defence within the Heavy Vehicle National Law. Legislation should be clear, coherent and current, so removing outdated provisions avoids confusion and keeps our statute book streamlined and contemporary.

The bill also amends the Road Transport (Offences) Regulation 2005 to remove reference to a “traffic offence detection device” when calculating the penalties for infringement notice offences by corporate vehicles. The corporate multiplier is applied to encourage businesses to identify the individual responsible for a traffic offence. Breaches of road transport laws compromise the safety of Canberrans and, as such, the penalties associated should not be written off as a cost of doing business. This provision dissuades that practice. This amendment futureproofs the regulation by removing unnecessary specificity, allowing emerging technologies in the detection of traffic offences to be used when accepted as evidence. Technology evolves rapidly and this amendment is about ensuring the regulation remains fit-for-purpose, regardless of technological change.

Finally, the bill clarifies accuracy tolerance requirements for testing speed-measuring devices used by ACT Policing. The amendment confirms that either a two per cent or a two-kilometre-per-hour tolerance may apply, depending on device specifications. It is a straightforward clarification that simply recognises the technological variation among devices and it removes unnecessary complexity in the existing provision.

While each measure in this bill is modest and—I hope and expect—uncontroversial, I certainly appreciate the autonomy and consideration that committees undertake on every bill before them, including on deciding whether to inquire. I note the interaction

with the timeframe that committees have for inquiries, if the decision is to inquire into this bill, and the fact that, to provide certainty and facilitate the Electoral Commission beginning their redistribution works in September, the bill needs to be passed in the June sitting. I certainly say this in good faith. It is not my intention to stifle consideration of an inquiry.

Although the other measures in the bill are modest, I certainly appreciate that the committee may wish to undertake an inquiry into them, and that is perfectly fine, but I note that the timeframe in the standing orders for inquiries interacts in a way that may mean that we are not able to debate this in June, when we need to. So I respectfully ask that they—whichever committee to which this is referred—engage with us so that we can see how we can get this debated and through, given it is something that is technical but important. Quite honestly, I think we all agree on that, so I hope it is not controversial. We might be able to split the bill. I do not know. I will not pre-empt what the committee decide to do. I just want to make the point that there is a timing imperative.

Each amendment in this bill, though individually modest, collectively contributes to a legislative system that is responsive, transparent and fit for purpose. It continues the Assembly's long tradition of ensuring that good lawmaking is not only about big reforms but also about careful, continuous refinement of the statute book. It aligns the community's expectations with our statute book, particularly during some of the most difficult parts of our lives.

Again, I sincerely thank Felicity for her time, her advocacy, her engagement and the trust that she has given me in the reform and also in sharing her story. I wholeheartedly commend the bill to the Assembly.

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

Sitting suspended from 12.16 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 absent from question time again today. As I understand was foreshadowed, ministers who will take questions are the same as yesterday. Just to recap: Minister Steel, will take questions in City and Government Services; Minister Paterson in Attorney-General and Human Rights; and Mr Pettersson in Night-time Economy.

Questions without notice

Cost of living—public transport fares

MR PARTON: My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, yesterday your government refused to support a straightforward cost-of-living measure to help Canberrans facing rising fuel costs by temporarily lowering bus fares to 50c. Why does your government not accept that higher fuel prices are already hurting household budgets?

MR BARR: Certainly higher fuel prices are hurting household budgets. This is a matter that is impacting across the nation. There is coordinated action at all levels of government to see that fuel supplies get through to areas where they are most needed, and there will continue to be a focus on that. We will continue to look at the range of options that are available to us in coordination with other levels of government and, indeed, other state and territory governments. That was what yesterday's motion suggested, and that is what we supported.

MR PARTON: Chief Minister, why are Canberra families being told to wait for the budget, when the pressure on household budgets is happening right now?

MR BARR: There are a range of actions that are being taken ahead of both the commonwealth and territory budgets. There is a very strong desire for action to be coordinated across different jurisdictions, and we will certainly be working closely with both New South Wales and the commonwealth, who will be our principal partners in relation to fuel security, fuel distribution and cost-of-living measures.

MRS MORRIS: Chief Minister, what practical help will your government deliver today for Canberra families already doing it tough by paying more at the bowser?

MR BARR: Obviously, I cannot announce government policy in question time, but we are particularly focused on working with New South Wales on fuel supply—

Mr Cocks: On a point of order: Mrs Morris did not ask for the Chief Minister to announce government policy but, rather, what actions are being taken today.

MR SPEAKER: She asked, "What will you do today?"—I think that was the specific language—rather than, "What are you doing?" "What will you do" suggests a call on the government to announce policy. He has mentioned that. He has not refused to answer the question. He is providing more information, but it is reasonable that he does not provide policy. He is explaining—I hope—what actions the government is taking. So we will find out, Mr Cocks.

MR BARR: I did not have many seconds to provide further information. But, yes, we will be coordinating with the commonwealth in relation to fuel supply and New South Wales in relation to fuel distribution. These are important things. As members are aware, the price of fuel will be the intersection of supply and demand. If we can get supply up and reduce demand, the price will fall—and that is the government's objective.

Fuel security

MR PARTON: My question is to the energy minister. Minister, exactly how many petrol stations across the ACT have run out of fuel, either completely or for a particular fuel type?

MS ORR: As I have said many times previously, this is a consistently evolving situation. The most recent information I have to hand is that over the previous 24 hours there were a total of four service stations that had reported an outage. Three, I believe I may have referenced yesterday, but they were three from yesterday—those three have

been restocked. There is an additional one that was out of diesel as of 11.30 am this morning. What I would add to this is, while we are seeing shortages, as I mentioned in yesterday's debate, these are not necessarily ongoing shortages, they are being resolved as supplies arrive in Canberra. Again, I would stress, a bit like a broken record, but I that if everyone can continue to keep their regular fuel buying habits that will actually take away a lot of the demand pressures we are seeing and hopefully resolve some of the issues we are seeing with those temporary outages.

MR PARTON: Minister, when were you first told ACT service stations were running dry, and what action have you taken with your federal and New South Wales counterparts to ensure that the diesel is still flowing here?

MS ORR: So again, we continue to work with our colleagues federally and across the states and territories for a coordinated response, and we also continue to work with industry, individual petrol stations, but also fuel suppliers, and work through how best to get supply. As one example, in answer to Mr Parton's question, the federal government has been working quite diligently on shoring up supply to Australia, and where the federal minister has seen some cancellations, they have actually worked to find supplies from other areas so that that supply continues to Australia. We will continue to support the federal government and our colleagues within that.

Within the ACT, we have a Rapid Response Fuel Taskforce set up within the City and Environment Directorate who are taking a focus on working with our petrol stations here in the ACT, feeding into the various mechanisms between jurisdictions and also to the Fuel Supply Taskforce that the commonwealth government has stood up, to make sure we are working in that coordinated fashion. The team that we have here in the territory will be liaising with petrol stations as to supply, but they will also be looking at fair trading concerns and using that information to inform further responses.

I think, if I remember correctly, the beginning of the question was going to what are we doing to make sure there is supply to the ACT. Again I would note the pressures that are on the system at the moment are from demand, from people looking to change their behaviours given the reporting and the circumstances that we are seeing globally. In order to shore up supply, the best thing we can do, again as the broken record is maintain our regular fuel purchasing positions. Again, we will see shortages. This is not the first time we have seen shortages. Petrol stations across Canberra will at times see fuel—
(Time expired.)

MR SPEAKER: Thank you Minister. Point of order, Mr Cocks?

MR COCKS: No, a supplementary. I do not know why you would think otherwise, Mr Speaker!

Minister, since the fuel crisis was first conceded to by your federal colleagues, how many fuel stations have had to hang out "Sorry, out of fuel" signs on bowsers in the ACT?

MS ORR: Mr Speaker, I do not agree with the phrasing of this question. Again, picking up where my last answer went to, we will see shortages occur across petrol stations, irrespective of whether we are in the situation that we are currently in. We may see

more of it under the current circumstances, but this idea that shortages will only ever happen because of the circumstances we now find ourselves in is a little bit disingenuous. So again, where we have seen shortages in the ACT, these have been responded to and reconciled, usually within hours. It has been a case that supplies are coming in, but because we have seen those demand pressures there, and those additional demand pressures there, the supply and the demand have not quite met up. So the timing can still be worked on. That is not the same as we have ongoing shortages within the ACT and we have no way of getting fuel to them. That is simply not the case.

Teachers—enterprise bargaining

MS LEE: My question is to the minister for education. Minister, I refer to the Australian Education Union's media release where they say they are preparing to take industrial action in term 2, following their lack of confidence in your directorate's handling of the enterprise bargaining process. The claims made by the AEU include adequate staffing, proper training, support for inclusive education, and planning for a sustainable workforce. Minister, do you support these basic, fundamental claims?

MS BERRY: I thank Ms Lee for the question. Of course, I am supportive of the work that the education union does in supporting its members in our public-school education system and making sure that they have all of the tools and systems in place so that they can give our children the best possible start in life.

There will be a range of claims that I would agree with in principle but, of course, a lot of claims that are made by unions in their negotiations with government come with a price tag and so all of those need to be considered. The AEU understands that as well.

Yesterday I spoke about the contact that my office has had with the education union over the last week or so, particularly talking in detail about some of the issues that they have raised, and reassuring them that the education directorate and my office and the government take these negotiations seriously, that the issues that the AEU has raised are taken seriously, and that we do want to continue our negotiations with them in good faith.

MS LEE: Minister, how can you not even say that you are willing to support those fundamental claims? And why has it taken such an extraordinarily long time for your directorate to respond?

MS BERRY: I do not think Ms Lee heard my answer—

Ms Lee: Yes, I did. You just said you support the Education Directorate's work with them.

MS BERRY: I do support the AEU's claims for their members, which is what I did say in my first answer; however, they do need to be negotiated because they come with a price tag, and we cannot just automatically say yes to everything without understanding it through the budget process. The AEU understands that.

Their members are frustrated about the length of time. I am empathetic about that frustration. I understand that, and I have sought to reassure the education union that

I am taking it seriously. And we will continue our negotiations with them, going forward, in good faith. That is what I have done over the last however-long I have been education minister, and what I intend to do now and into the future.

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, do you retain confidence in your directorate's handling of the negotiations, or lack thereof, with the AEU?

MS BERRY: I am confident that the Education Directorate will be able to continue negotiations in good faith. I understand and, as I said, I am empathetic that the education union is frustrated with the length of time that has taken. I think the directorate understands that as well, and we have both committed to continue our negotiations in good faith with the education union.

Teachers—enterprise bargaining

MS LEE: My question is to the minister for education. Minister, in question time yesterday, you said that your directorate had been negotiating with the AEU in good faith. However, the AEU has said, and I quote directly:

We lodged our logs of claims in July 2025. For more than seven months, the Education Directorate failed to respond substantively; we had to seek Ministerial intervention just to receive any reply at all ...

Minister, is it acceptable for them to be waiting more than seven months and having to get your office to intervene directly just to get a reply in "good faith"?

MS BERRY: Well, clearly there has been some kind of breakdown between the Education Union and the directorate. I understand the frustration that the Education Union are experiencing right now. I have acknowledged that publicly. My office has been speaking with the Education Union, and I know that the director-general has met with the Education Union today about a range of issues, including bargaining, and we are keen to get that back on track and restore the relationship to a more positive one and have a good outcome for Education Union members and all staff that work in our public school system.

MS LEE: Minister, how did your government allow such a breakdown in communication and in the relationship with the ACT's teaching workforce? And why should Canberra's teachers trust anything you say about valuing them when this is the way that they are treated?

MS BERRY: These are enterprise bargaining negotiation processes, and from time to time unions will take opportunities, which is within their right to do, to agitate and organise their members to get the best possible deal that they can from their employer, in this case the government.

They have expressed some frustration with that process. I have acknowledged that frustration. I am keen to get that negotiation back on track, and I know that the Education Directorate is too. We have expressed that that to the Education Union over the last week and as recently as today, I understand, in the conversations that the director-general has had with the Education Union representative.

MR CAIN: Minister, what assurances can you give Canberran families that this debacle, which could result in the AEU taking industrial action, is not a result of the mismanagement of the education budget?

MS BERRY: Well, you know, I do not agree—

Mr Cain: So what do we know?

MS BERRY: I do not agree with the premise of the question that Mister Cain has asked.

Mr Cain: There's no premise; what assurances can you give?

Ms Stephen-Smith: A point of order, Mr Speaker. Mr Cain has asked his question. He cannot keep asking further questions while the minister is seeking to answer his original question.

Mr Cain interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Mr Cain, you have asked your question; maybe just sit there and listen for a response, otherwise I will have to take further action.

MS BERRY: Thank you, Mr Speaker. As I said, I do not agree with the premise. The Education Directorate is working in good faith with the Education Union. It is a bargaining process. There will be moments when either the employer or the union will disagree in that process, and there will be a requirement for the Education Union to represent their members. That is their job. I would be, as I said yesterday, the last person to interfere in that process. I understand that they need to do that. I am keen to get the relationship back on track and for those bargaining processes to be seen by both parties as serious negotiations that are attempting to make sure that the ACT remains one of the best public education systems in the country.

I would like it very much if the Education Union did not take industrial action. But that is absolutely within their prerogative, and that is something that unions will do as a matter of course and I support that action. In fact, ABC journalists are taking industrial action today, and I support that industrial action as well and would not want to interfere with that. My hope is that will not happen, but I understand it might be the case that the Education Union decides to do that.

Planning—Hume Circle precinct

MR RATTENBURY: My question is to the Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development. Minister, in a Suburban Land Agency attachment to the ACT government's submission to the National Capital Authority on draft amendment 102 for the Hume Circle precinct, the SLA comments that:

The logic behind the Building height framework does not appear to be based on best practice urban design principles.

They go on to say:

Such an approach favours the Jega Consortia rather than an approach which more equitably distributes higher buildings across Hume Circle and broader East Lake.

Minister, do the SLA comments reflect the position of the government?

MR STEEL: Yes, they do. I refer to the government's submission from the Territory Planning Authority, which also notes that the building height and density proposed in DA102 are substantially higher than was considered in the East Lake place plan.

MR RATTENBURY: Minister, given your stated position, why did the SLA continue to propose 12- to 15-storey buildings in their submission, including on section 84, which already has missing middle style housing?

MR STEEL: I refer the member to the Territory Planning Authority's submission, which talks about the place plan anticipating variable heights in the Mildura Street precinct, noting that the place plan did not fully cover the area that has been considered by the National Capital Authority in DA102, which generally had heights of five to six storeys on Hume Circle, increasing to around eight storeys towards the railway precinct. The government has noted in the submission that this would lead to a yield of roughly 5,500 dwellings and a population of approximately 12,000. This proposal that has been brought forward by a proponent, the Jega consortium, would lead to a very high number of residents in the area, and that may have an impact on infrastructure. In terms of the actual specific detail, I would refer Mr Rattenbury to the Territory Planning Authority's submission. That is also publicly available and on view on the NCA's website.

MS CLAY: Minister, why didn't the ACT government ask for section 84 to be excluded from the plan, given that it already had medium density missing middle housing?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question. I again refer her to the Territory Planning Authority's submission, which has raised the issues. I also note again to the Assembly that what has been put forward in this DA102 is a relatively high-level plan. There will be a further round of consultation on more detailed design conditions associated with any further proposal once it has been considered by the NCA. The ACT government is involved with the NCA in providing feedback in relation to this proposal. I am sure that the NCA will be taking into account the views of the territory as they consider this matter.

Mr Rattenbury: A point of order under standing order 118AA. Ms Clay specifically asked the minister why the government did not put a certain position. He has referred her to the submission, but the submission does not address the question, which is why she has asked the question.

MR SPEAKER: I will allow the minister time to continue. He still has a bit of time to go.

MR STEEL: I will take that on notice and direct that question to the Chief Planner. The Territory Planning Authority made the submission on behalf of the ACT government.

MR SPEAKER: He has taken that on notice, Mr Rattenbury.

Playgrounds and play spaces—Watson

MR EMERSON: My question is for the minister representing the Minister for City and Government Services. I was at Maliyan Park in Watson with my kids over the weekend. It is one of their favourite playgrounds, and rightly so given its \$3 million price tag! The playground surface, though, is completely falling apart. My son was finding crumbling pieces of the soft-fall surface and bringing them to me—like this one here. This playground opened only—

Ms Berry: Point of order: I believe that it is against parliamentary processes to bring a prop into the place. Mr Emerson should remove the prop, under your direction, Mr Speaker.

MR SPEAKER: I would ask you not to display a prop, Mr Emerson. Standing orders say that you cannot.

MR EMERSON: I would be happy to table the piece for members' benefit.

MR SPEAKER: Just leave it alone. There are no props, and if you show it again I will have to take action.

MR EMERSON: Shall I continue?

MR SPEAKER: Please do.

MR EMERSON: This playground opened only a year and a half ago, and half of it is now fenced off for repairs because the surface has deteriorated so badly. The contract for the project specified a one-year post-completion warranty period, during which the contractor is responsible for maintenance and defects. Minister, who is footing the bill for these repairs?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. I am sure that, like me, he spends a lot of weekends touring the ACT's parks and playgrounds with our young ones. I know how valued these parks are to the Canberra community, particularly families. Maliyan Park in Watson opened on 24 August 2024. I will seek feedback via the City and Environment Directorate on behalf of Minister Cheyne in relation to the financial and maintenance requirements of the contractor and current maintenance for this particular park.

MR EMERSON: Mr Speaker, could I confirm that the detail has been taken on notice.

MR SPEAKER: By his answer, I presume that he has taken that on notice.

MR EMERSON: Thank you. Minister, what is the expected lifespan of new playgrounds being built in the ACT?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. I am happy to take that on notice.

But I would certainly note that many of the playgrounds that have historically been built in the ACT have lasted many decades and continue to serve the community, though they may need maintenance from time to time to make sure that they are safe for the community to use. Indeed, when I was the minister, we had a big program around refreshing local playgrounds and painting them. An ongoing audit is undertaken in relation to safety, and improvements are made on that basis to make sure that they can continue to serve the community.

MS CARRICK: Minister, how widely has this soft-fall surface been used across ACT playgrounds? And is there any planned use for it in upcoming builds?

MR STEEL: I am not sure of the specific product that has been used at this particular playground. I will seek some advice about that. Generally speaking, a soft-fall surface is used in new playgrounds across the territory and in playgrounds in cities around Australia. It is a common safety feature that is often applied to playgrounds, but obviously the products may differ within the broader soft-fall segment. I will come back in relation to this specific playground, as well as whether any remediation is required.

Planning—Arscott House site

MS CLAY: My question is to the Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development. Minister, a draft major plan amendment has been released for the site that was occupied by Arscott House and used for student accommodation. The University of Canberra now owns the land and demolished the buildings in 2020. The university is proposing to vary the zoning from Community Facility to Commercial Business Zone. The site is a significant community facility of over 10,000 square metres. The amendment says the development of the site needs to make a suitable contribution to the long-term provision of community and social facilities in the broader Belconnen area. What is a suitable contribution, how is it measured and why wasn't a figure identified?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question. I note that, in relation to major plan amendments they can be put forward by proponents under the Planning Act, and I do not have the ability to intervene when they are. They must be considered by the Territory Planning Authority. The Territory Planning Authority make the decision to accept those or not. If they accept them, they must prepare the draft amendment and publish that for the community to be able to provide their comment. That will be the process, I am sure, for this major plan amendment that has been proposed.

In relation to the other matters that Ms Clay mentioned, I will take the question on notice and come back to the Assembly with some further detail.

MS CLAY: With no enforceable conditions on the lease or zone, how will the government ensure that this contribution to community and social facilities is maintained in the future?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question. The independent Territory Planning Authority will consider the major plan amendment and assess it against the requirements under the Planning Act. They will look at a range of different matters. Then, of course, it will go to the Assembly's planning committee. They may wish to inquire into it and make their own recommendations in relation to it before it comes

back to the authority, back to me, and then to the Assembly again.

MISS NUTTALL: Minister, given that the land was gifted to the university for no cost and they no longer want it for university purposes like student accommodation, why doesn't the territory ask the university to hand the land back?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question. The government has no plans to ask the university to hand the land back. We will consider the proposal that has been put forward through the planning app processes that I have outlined.

Community legal organisations—funding

MS BARRY: My question is to the Attorney-General. Attorney-General, last year, your government signed the National Access to Justice Partnership Agreement 2025-2030, agreeing "The States will maintain their level of effort and investment in legal assistance services, in real terms over the life of the Agreement, for each subsector of the legal assistance sector," to provide certainty to legal assistance providers. Why have legal service providers like Canberra Community Law still not received confirmation of their baseline funding arrangements in line with the government's commitment to providing funding certainty to these providers?

DR PATERSON: I will take the question on notice, but just to say how much we value our community law services in the territory, and that we are currently going through a budget process as we speak.

MS BARRY: Minister, in line with the NAJP agreement, will the ACT government commit to providing at least 12 months advance notice on funding distributions so these providers can effectively plan, prepare and strengthen service delivery?

DR PATERSON: As I said in the previous answer, we are currently undertaking a budget process so it will be subject to budget considerations.

MRS MORRIS: Why is the government putting vulnerable Canberrans at risk by failing to provide funding certainty to these vital community legal service providers?

DR PATERSON: I acknowledge the challenges that these community legal services are facing and the government is hearing those responses. I know the Attorney-General is very cognisant of these issues, and as I said in the previous answers, these are matters that are subject to budget consideration.

Centenary Hospital for Women and Children—Neonatal Intensive Care Unit—funding

MR CAIN: My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, thanks to the Newborn Intensive Care Foundation, the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit, or NICU, at the Canberra Hospital now has eight new monitors which provide non-invasive measures of blood oxygen and heart rate data in babies. Importantly, all eight were paid for by the foundation, following a request from the unit. Before these monitors were donated, these sick newborn babies had to have blood taken manually and await lab testing for a clinician to then evaluate treatment. Minister, despite the egregious spending habits of

your Labor government, why did the funding for these vital pieces of equipment rely on a charitable foundation?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mr Cain for the question, and for drawing the Assembly's attention to the wonderful work of the Newborn Intensive Care Foundation. It is a long-term partner with Canberra Health Services and the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit, or NICU, and the staff work very closely with the foundation to understand what investments might be helpful.

I do not think it is accurate to draw a conclusion that these particular pieces of equipment would not have been purchased otherwise. But I know that the foundation is very, very committed to supporting the NICU's important work. The NICU engages in a lot of nation-leading work but also engages in a lot of research to understand the best care for neonates—particularly the premature and sick babies that they look after.

MR CAIN: Minister, is it the expectation that the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit relies on outdated and manual tests?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: That would not be my expectation, but technologies change over time and the capacity of different areas of the hospital to have the latest technology available to them is an evolving situation.

As I indicated, the staff at the NICU work very closely with the foundation. They also work very closely with the Canberra Hospitals Foundation, as well as with their leadership, to understand who would like to make what investments and contributions in relation to new equipment.

So, I will do a little bit more research in relation to this particular matter, and I thank Mr Cain for drawing it to attention—but I do not agree with the way that he has characterised the issue.

MR PARTON: Minister, how could the government possibly deliver these vital services to Canberra families without a charity doing the heavy lifting?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I think I have already answered that question, Mr Speaker. It is a part of the work that the NICU does, to work with our foundations as well as with senior leadership to ensure that neonates—premature babies and sick babies—are getting the best care. In a tertiary hospital, the NICU not only supports the people of the ACT but a wide area of surrounding NSW, and provides outstanding care for babies and their families.

Planning—City Hill park

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, can you outline the next steps for City Hill park?

MR BARR: I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for the question, and, yes, I can. I am sure members are aware that City Hill park is a five hectare, but significantly underutilised, space in the centre of our city, enclosed by Vernon Circle—probably one of the larger

roundabouts in Canberra—and it of course forms a key point in the National Triangle.

Following community interest demonstrated through the recent City Hill ideas exhibition, which received more than 600 survey submissions and 69 design proposals, the next stage is finalising a park master plan. As part of this process, the City Renewal Authority is continuing community engagement, including a community discussion delivered in partnership with Salon Canberra and complemented by a TEDxCanberra Awakening City Hill event.

A People's Panel will also be established, comprising 30 members of the community. After the People's Panel deliberations, draft master plan options will be shared for feedback.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Chief Minister, why is it important to reimagine City Hill as a key and potentially iconic Civic and community park?

MR BARR: Thank you. City Hill is, frankly, rarely used. There are often more rabbits there than there are people, and we have an opportunity to change this. A revitalised City Hill park can become a central park that connects the city centre. It should be used more, and as we progress this work, we are building on what we have already heard from the community to support the city centre's growth.

MS TOUGH: Chief Minister, what are some of the suggestions that have been made to include in the park?

MR BARR: I thank Ms Tough for the supplementary. There is strong community support for improved access, lighting, safety and shade, as well as native plantings and cultural expression. There was also clear interest in family friendly areas, arts and performance spaces and recreation facilities.

Feedback from more recent events highlights further significance in prioritising pedestrian access and making City Hill a meaningful, inclusive and well-functioning public space.

Stromlo Forest Park—Tracks and Trails Masterplan

MS CARRICK: My question is to the Minister for City and Government Services. Labor's plan for Molonglo from the 2024 election promised to start implementing the Stromlo Forest Park Tracks and Trails Masterplan and to create a mountain bike trail maintenance fund. The plan also said that work will begin next year—meaning 2025—on the Stromlo to Cotter mountain flow trail. The government's public project page says construction of the Stromlo to Cotter mountain bike trail is anticipated to commence in 2026. Minister, what milestones have been completed? What is still outstanding, and will the government meet its 2026 construction timeframe?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question. I will take this on behalf of the Minister for City and Government Services. I will take it on notice and come back to Ms Carrick with more information about that. Obviously, the government has committed to undertaking work not only on the Stromlo masterplan but also on the Stromlo to Cotter mountain bike trail. We will come back to the Assembly with some

more detail about how we will provide that facility for our mountain biking community.

MS CARRICK: Minister, has the government established a publicly available delivery schedule for stage 1 of the Tracks and Trails Masterplan and how progress against these milestones is being monitored?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question, and I refer her to the ACT Built for CBR website, where there is a project timeline. The project is currently in the detailed design and approval stage and is currently showing construction in 2026, with the project complete in 2027-28.

MR EMERSON: Minister, will the government publish a regular public trails status and maintenance schedule for Stromlo, so that riders can see what works are planned, when they will occur and what standard the government is working to?

MR BARR: The park itself sits within my areas. Yes, they are undertaking regular work. If it is not already on their website, I will ensure that it will be in the future.

Foundational Supports and Thriving Kids

MR CAIN: My question is to the Minister for Disability, Carers and Community Services. Minister, in your ministerial statement on 18 February this year on Thriving Kids, you confirmed that the ACT has signed a bilateral agreement with the commonwealth and that \$1.4 billion will be allocated to states and territories to deliver these services. Minister, how much of that funding will the ACT receive?

MS ORR: Mr Speaker, can Mr Cain repeat the question?

MR SPEAKER: Mr Cain, just the last bit of the question.

MR CAIN: Minister, in your statement of 18 February on Thriving Kids, you confirmed that the ACT has signed a bilateral agreement with the commonwealth and that \$1.4 billion will be allocated to states and territories to deliver these services. How much of that funding will the ACT receive?

MS ORR: I am checking. I have the \$4 billion number in front of me. Going specifically to Mr Cain's question about how much the ACT will receive, I think I know the number, but I want to double-check it so I do not get it wrong. If Mr Cain can bear with me, I will come back in matters arising from question time.

MR SPEAKER: You have taken that on notice?

MS ORR: Yes.

MR SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister. Mr Cain.

MR CAIN: Minister, when will the ACT government publicly release the full bilateral agreement and funding allocation for the territory?

MS ORR: We continue to work through the bilateral agreement. Negotiations are

ongoing. We will be looking at signing those in accordance with the agreement that was made by national cabinet at the beginning of the year, and we are looking at rolling out as per the revised timeframe. I believe we are looking at May to finalise that bilateral agreement, but, of course, I would note that negotiations are always negotiations, and this one has been quite a journey. It will be in May, unless we hear otherwise.

MR COCKS: Minister, will the ACT be required to match or co-fund any portion of the funding?

MS ORR: I point the member to all of the publicly available information, which indicates that this—

Opposition members interjecting—

MS ORR: If you would let me answer the question without interjecting, you would get the answer. All the publicly available information points to Foundational Supports—and Thriving Kids being part of that—being a delivery between the federal and state and territory governments, and it is on a partnership basis of 50-50.

ACT courts—case management system

MS BARRY: My question is to the Attorney-General. Given the current integrated case management system, ICMS, used by the ACT courts and the legal community more broadly expires in June this year, we are repeatedly hearing concerns about how this digital infrastructure is seriously out of date, inefficient and not fit-for-purpose. This is increasingly concerning given the high volume of work that courts face each year. Minister, has the government updated this system since it was installed? If not, why?

DR PATERSON: I will take that on notice; thank you.

MS BARRY: Minister, why has the government neglected recent calls to improve inefficiencies that have strained our courts for so long?

DR PATERSON: I reject the premise of that question. The Attorney-General is in constant conversation with the courts around the systems that they use. I will take the first question on notice and get back to the Assembly.

MRS MORRIS: Minister, what work has the government done to prepare to upgrade this digital infrastructure once it expires in June?

DR PATERSON: I will take that on notice.

Motor vehicles—numberplate duplication

MR PARTON: My question is to whoever is dealing with Access Canberra today. I cannot remember what you pointed out at the start.

Mr Barr: It would be Minister Steel.

MR PARTON: Excellent; I like dealing with Minister Steel!

Minister, number plates are such an important component of the government's ability to identify individual vehicles, vehicle owners and drivers, particularly in this era of infringements being issued entirely on the basis of images captured on the roadside. Minister, has the government ever issued the same number plate twice, meaning that an infringement notice for a camera-issued fine could potentially go to two different car owners and if so, how could this possibly have occurred?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. I will take this on notice on behalf of Minister Cheyne who is responsible for that part of Access Canberra and come back to the Assembly with some more information. If the member has a specific instance that he wanted to pass on to Minister Cheyne that would assist in answering that question, I am sure she would be happy to receive that, and for Access Canberra to investigate what has occurred if there is an alleged issue.

MR PARTON: Minister, why is there currently a 1968 Morris Mini and 2021 Porsche registered in the ACT with the same number plate, and indeed, five other examples of duplication that have come to our attention which are very clear on the Access Canberra website?

MR STEEL: Again, I will come back on notice on behalf of Minister Cheyne in relation to that. I am happy to provide what information we can, noting that there could be some potential privacy issues there. We will see what information can be provided.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, other than other than the six instances Mr Parton mentioned, how many other instances are there of duplicated number plates in the ACT?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question. I will see whether we can get some information from Access Canberra about that, noting that there are different numberplate types in the territory as well.

Housing—affordability

MISS NUTTALL: My question is to the minister for housing. The National Rental Affordability Scheme (NRAS) is due to fully end by June this year. What impact will this have on the 352 NRAS dwellings at the University of Canberra? Will they continue to be rented at an affordable rental rate? What will happen to the students who presently live in them?

MS BERRY: I will take that question on notice.

MISS NUTTALL: Minister, has the University of Canberra offered any assurances to the people living in the units that the 352 units will continue to be offered at an affordable rental rate?

MS BERRY: I will take that question on notice, as well.

MS CLAY: If the rent for these 352 dwellings increases, what support will the ACT government provide to tenants so they can continue their studies at the University of Canberra?

MS BERRY: I will also take that question on notice, because it assumes something that I do not know the answer to yet. I will bring that answer back to the Assembly.

City services—e-bikes and e-scooters

MR BRADDOCK: My question is for Minister Steel, either with his hat as Minister for Transport or as acting for the Minister for City and Government Services.

I draw your attention to the decision to award Lime scooters and e-bikes a contract for the e-mobility services in the ACT. At the same time Neuron scooters have lost their contract. Minister, why did Neuron scooters lose their contract?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. I will respond on notice on behalf of Minister Cheyne. Obviously, when it comes to procurement decisions like this, they are at arm's-length from the minister, so I will seek some advice about what decisions were made in relation to that particular contract.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, why is the government favouring offering a monopoly to just a single service provider rather than seeking a market with competition with multiple providers?

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

MR RATTENBURY: Minister, why is the government confident that Canberra can sustain only one e-mobility provider when it previously sustained two?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. I will come back in relation to the previous questions with some more information in relation to the decision and the tender process, but I do note that the territory did have one provider following the decision to discontinue the contract with Beam, following noncompliance with their contract. So we have actually had one provider for quite a considerable period of time up until this point, and that would continue under the new contract.

COTA ACT—UpstAgeing Canberra

MS TOUGH: My question is to the Minister for Seniors and Veterans. Minister, can you update the Assembly on the seniors arts festival that is happening in Canberra?

MS ORR: I thank Ms Tough for the opportunity to talk about what has been a very enthusiastically embraced festival. I am pleased to update the Assembly on the ACT seniors arts festival, called UpstAgeing Canberra, which is being delivered by COTA ACT. It is currently on, and it is running until this coming Sunday, 29 March. I would also like to acknowledge the advocacy and work of my Ministerial Advisory Council on Ageing in developing this festival.

UpstAgeing is the first large-scale arts festival celebrating creative ageing, and it kicked off last Friday. The ACT government has a strong and longstanding partnership with COTA in addressing the issues affecting older people in Canberra. I am grateful for their leadership in coordinating this festival. There is a range of performances, exhibitions, workshops, visual arts, theatre, music, dance, storytelling, design, and

more. I encourage all members and the wider community to have a look on the COTA website to see what events are still going on, and pop along and check them out.

MS TOUGH: Minister, what benefits does this festival bring to the Canberra community?

MS ORR: It is fair to say that this puts a really strong focus on older Canberrans and healthy ageing, which is essential for our community. People aged over 60 are one of the growing parts of our community. Here in the ACT we have some of the longest life expectancy in Australia.

UpstAgeing promotes Canberra as an arts capital and an age-friendly city. It fosters important conversations about healthy ageing within the community. Everyone has worked very diligently and very hard to deliver the UpstAgeing festival. A lot of community groups have been invited to provide input, and to collaborate with the organisers to run a workshop or a performance. We are seeing a great variety, with a huge number of events. It is the first time that we have done this festival. It has been embraced by the community, as has been shown in the enthusiasm that is there for not only this sort of event and activities but also the themes and the opportunities that come from having a discussion on how we can age positively.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Minister, what support is provided to this event?

MS ORR: Again, this has been advocated for by the Ministerial Advisory Council on Ageing, and the ACT government is providing funding for the festival. It is a pilot, to see how it goes, given that it is the first one in Australia. We are now seeing the benefits of that government support and investment. I would like to recognise and thank everyone who has taken this idea and the seed funding, and shown what can be achieved from it.

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

Supplementary answers to questions without notice

Foundational Supports and Thriving Kids

MS ORR: With regard to Mr Cain's question on the amount of money coming to the ACT for Thriving Kids, it might sound like a simple question, but it actually has a number of components to it. There is a \$4 billion agreement to be split 50-50 between the states and territories. The commonwealth will be providing \$1.4 billion of its portion to the states and territories. That will combine with the \$2 billion that the states and territories are contributing. When you apply that to the ACT, we are looking at a total investment of approximately \$60 million across five years. That is made up of the ACT contribution and the commonwealth's contribution, and it is one that—

Mr Cain: Sorry—is the \$60 million all ACT or mixed?

MS ORR: No—I just said this, mate. Mr Speaker, as well as updating the Assembly, I might shoot Mr Cain an email afterwards with all these figures so that he has them in front of him and can see them clearly. The bilateral agreement was signed in February. I have provided some information in the past around this. There are a lot of components

and we will continue to update the Assembly. Given that it is complex, if you have questions, please feel free to ask me when I have more than two minutes to answer them.

Canberra Health Services—communicable diseases—standing order 118A

MR PARTON: Pursuant to standing order 118A, as opposed to 118AA, I am rising to request an explanation concerning an unanswered question in the health space. Minister Stephen-Smith stood in this chamber and responded to a question of mine regarding a patient reportedly left in a general waiting room with measles before extended isolation. Ms Stephen-Smith took the question on notice and, it being 30 days since that date, I rise to seek an explanation for the unanswered question.

MR SPEAKER: Is this a question that was asked of the minister during questions without notice? Is it a question on the notice paper?

MR PARTON: No. This was a question that was taken on notice in question time, and my understanding is that she has 30 days to respond to that, and that has not occurred.

MR SPEAKER: Correct. So it is not on the notice paper. Minister, do you have a response?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I apologise to Mr Parton that I have not been in a position to respond to that yet. I am still awaiting advice from Canberra Health Services.

Planning—Arscott House site—standing order 118AA

MISS NUTTALL: Forgive me—I try to not do this too often—but I have a retrospective point of order under standing order 118AA. My social anxiety kicked in at the time and I did not stand up. I believe that Minister Steel was asked why the territory would not ask the university to hand the land back. He said he would not ask the territory, but nothing in his answer went to why.

MR SPEAKER: I think that he was relevant and responsive. I accept that he could have been more elaborative. The fact is that he said that the government would not. If the minister has something further to add, it would be useful.

MR STEEL: I actually went on to say that there is a major plan amendment process underway as well, which would suggest that it would not be an appropriate time to do so.

MR SPEAKER: I think he has been responsive. I accept that he has not given you a direct answer that would satisfy you, but he responded sufficiently and it does not merit anything further.

Foundational Supports and Thriving Kids

MS ORR: Also with regard to Mr Cain's question on Thriving Kids, I believe I said in my answer that we were still negotiating the bilateral agreement for Thriving Kids. It

is actually the implementation plan which is nested within that broader agreement. For clarity, I want to make sure we have the right document. That will be finalised, with services to commence by 1 October and a full stand-up by January 2028.

Legislative Assembly—props Ruling by Speaker

MR SPEAKER: During question time, a point of order was taken about whether you can use props. There is actually no standing order relating to props in the Assembly, so you have to refer to the *Companion to the Standing Orders* and to *House of Representatives Practice*. You can look at both of those. You can read them. I will not read it all out, but the summation is:

... the general attitude from the Chair has been that visual props are ‘tolerated but not encouraged’.

Where it seems to lead is that, if you have a prop that is specifically relatable to the issue at hand, it is probably more likely to be tolerated. In this case—Mr Emerson’s prop—I probably would tolerate it. If it were not the member speaking but Mr Werner-Gibbings moving a placard—I will pick on you—or someone not directly involved in the speech, that is different. It is a bit dependent on the chair. There is no standing order that says you cannot do it.

Mr Parton: I’ll be opening the floodgates here!

MR SPEAKER: I repeat that it is not encouraged, Mr Parton. I remind members, though, that they can always seek leave if they have something, and then it is a matter for the chamber to make that decision. It does not always rest on the chair. So, if you have something that you think would benefit the debate, it may be tolerated, but, as I said, not encouraged, and you can always seek leave. That is a point of clarification about props. We have all learnt something.

Mr Emerson: Mr Speaker, on that clarification, are there limits on what can be tabled? I would love to seek leave to table the piece of Maliyan Park.

MR SPEAKER: There would be limits. I will get some advice on that from the Clerk. All I would say is that, if you table something, the Territory Records Act indicates it has to be stored forever, so I would certainly encourage members not to.

Mr Emerson: It’s made of microplastics. It will last forever.

MR SPEAKER: As I said, I would encourage you not to table them. That is what the standing orders say. It comes down a bit to the tolerance of the chair and, as I said, you are not encouraged to do it. That is what the rules say and we are here to implement the rules.

Supplementary answer to a question without notice

Canberra Health Services—communicable diseases—standing order 118A

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Regarding Mr Parton’s question earlier in relation to a question that I took on notice and have not responded to yet, the advice from my office is that the response is not yet overdue. The actual due date is 27 March.

Papers

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

Bus Frequency Improvement—Assembly resolution of 5 December 2024—Government response—Third update, dated March 2026.

Jumbunna Review—Final Report of the Independent Review into the Overrepresentation of First Nations People in the ACT Criminal Justice System—Government response—March 2026 update to the Legislative Assembly—Ministerial statement, dated March 2026.

Rapid bus routes R2 and R3—Reinstatement—Assembly resolution of 26 February 2026—Government response—Implementation Plan—Rapid Services (R2/R4/R3/R5), dated March 2026.

Gungahlin—economic development

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (3.00): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) the Gungahlin Community Council’s 2025 Gungahlin community survey with 1,320 responses found:
 - (i) 91 percent of respondents work outside Gungahlin;
 - (ii) 82 percent believe the Government should develop strategies to attract more commercial businesses;
 - (iii) limited retail options in the town centre; and
 - (iv) desire for a stronger night-time economy;
- (b) the Assembly unanimously agreed to the motion of 6 June 2023 calling on the Minister for Economic Development to:
 - (i) as a part of CBR Switched On, investigate strategies to enhance economic development in districts that lack an anchor employer;
 - (ii) advocate for Commonwealth investment in the Gungahlin district with the Federal Labor Government; and
 - (iii) investigate setting ambitious targets for employment growth in Gungahlin and other districts for the census years of 2026 and 2031, including as a proportion of the workforce resident in the district;
- (c) since this motion, the Government:
 - (i) declined to set employment targets for Gungahlin or investigate district-specific economic development strategies; and
 - (ii) failed to obtain significant increases in federal government

- employment in the Gungahlin district;
- (d) the developer of the Gungahlin cinema site has not commenced construction, failing to comply with the building and development provision in the lease requiring the cinema to be built by 28 February 2024;
 - (e) under section 99 of the *Planning (General) Regulation 2023*, the fee is zero for the first to the fourth year of noncompliance, which has proven to be ineffective at enforcing development conditions and instead incentivises lease squatting; and
 - (f) the lack of noise standards for the Gungahlin Town Centre Entertainment Precinct are creating uncertainty and inhibiting development applications; and
- (2) calls on the Government to:
- (a) acknowledge that people who live in Gungahlin have limited opportunities to work in the area and that many are forced to look for employment in other parts of Canberra;
 - (b) review the future release of land so that it is consistent with economic development strategies that will increase the level of local employment opportunities so that the proportion of Gungahlin residents commuting outside of their region for employment matches Canberra averages;
 - (c) review the land uses in the Gungahlin policy to ensure that local employment opportunities are maximised;
 - (d) amend section 99 of the *Planning (General) Regulation 2023* to ensure noncompliance fees are fully payable throughout the entire non-compliance period;
 - (e) develop noise standards for the Gungahlin Town Centre Entertainment Precinct;
 - (f) set ambitious targets for employment growth in Gungahlin and other districts for the census years of 2031 and 2036, including as a proportion of the workforce resident in the district; and
 - (g) report back to the Assembly by the first sitting day in December 2026 on these actions.

This motion is for the residents for Gungahlin, the first district developed post self-government. Arising from the sheep paddocks in the 1990s, it is populated with diverse, dynamic and rapidly increasing peoples. Were Gungahlin a city in its own right, with our 2021 census population of about 85,000, it would be the 23rd largest city in Australia, nestled between Rockhampton and Mackay. But in the next 15 years the area around the Gungahlin town centre is forecast to exceed the population of 100,000 people—people who, unfortunately, have to leave their district each and every day to go to work. When I saw the result of the Gungahlin Community Council’s 2025 Community Survey, showing that 91 per cent of respondents have to travel outside of Gungahlin for work, I was shocked but not surprised. The Gungahlin Community Council has over many years repeatedly and consistently called for greater employment opportunities and economic activation of the town centre.

In 2021, I brought a motion before this Assembly which called for a targeted approach to encourage job creation in Gungahlin, which the Assembly supported unanimously.

It called for the Minister for Economic Development to use the Economic Development Strategy—which was then called CBR Switched On—to investigate strategies to enhance economic development in districts without an anchor employer. It called for advocacy for commonwealth government investment in the Gungahlin district and the ACT Labor Economic Development Minister—who also happened to be the Chief Minister—to talk to their federal Labor colleagues. I also called for measurement of employment growth aligned to the census years of 2026 and 2031 to see how far the government has come in achieving its target.

What is clear is that the ACT government has failed to achieve meaningful outcomes in terms of increasing employment in the Gungahlin district. While CBR Switched On played lip-service to Gungahlin, there is scant evidence that this was backed up with consistent action. Gungahlin residents have obviously taken note, as can be seen in the results of the community survey. I know governing is hard, but it affects real lives. I hope the Minister for Economic Development is taking note and I hope the directorate is taking note. As a member for Yerrabi, I care deeply about the prospects of people in my electorate and I will not stop advocating for them, especially where I can see more could have been done.

I want to talk briefly about why local employment is so important. Local employment creates opportunities for an improved work-life balance with less time spent commuting. It reduces emissions and wear and tear on our roads. It creates social and community connections in your local neighbourhood. It means more services, whether it be retail, professional or medical. This is far more preferable than Gungahlin residents having to commute each day across our city to take up employment. Those who point to light rail as the reason why Gungahlin residents leave the district for employment purposes, I remind them that light rail, in fact, travels in both directions. Maximising travel both ways can create enormous efficiencies and benefits for Canberra. I personally take great delight in hosting events in Gungahlin that attract residents to the inner north to catch the light rail out to Gungahlin.

We need the ACT government to do what is within its power to ensure the people who live in Gungahlin can work in Gungahlin if they want to. With land being released around the town centre, consideration needs to be given to the kind of development that is encouraged. My call is on the government to ensure we have enough building space for employment purposes, so that the proportion of Gungahlin residents commuting outside of their region comes down to the ACT average. Likewise, I would like to see the land uses in Gungahlin policy ensure that local employment opportunities are maximised for the residents of Gungahlin.

Those of you familiar with Gungahlin also know that despite many promises, announcements and even debates in this chamber over the years, we lack a cinema. Every other town centre in Canberra has one—and, frankly, it is time we got one too. The lack of one makes for a long journey to another town centre and prevents Gungahlin residents from coming together in a convenient location to watch the latest blockbuster from Hollywood or Bollywood or, indeed, catch a new Aussie release. Sadly, the story of a Gungahlin cinema is now wrapped up in the ACT government's planning framework lacking genuine enforcement mechanisms. In 2022, the developer signed a lease where they committed to complete the cinema by 28 February 2024. Two years past this date, Gungahlin residents are looking at a blank patch of earth and are missing

out on the benefits for which that piece of land was sold. If you, I, or anyone else were to sign a contract, we would expect to be held to account to the commitments in that contract. But, on questioning the Minister for Planning, I have learnt that under our planning regulations the fees for non-compliance for building provisions is zero for the first four years.

I understand that there needs to be flexibility and discretion to handle events outside of the developer's control—we might be talking about COVID, war or supply chain disruptions—but there also needs to be an effective deterrent for non-compliance; otherwise, developers lose their social licence, other developers miss out on commercial opportunities and the community miss out most of all. I know the Minister for Planning likes to point to the Gungahlin 2030 proposal, which may have a cinema. This is a project that is still awaiting further action from the ACT government, including the noise standards mentioned elsewhere within my motion, before that project can proceed. This project is still only a proposal and a development application beyond the early work stage has yet to be submitted; a proposal that currently only has space for a three-screen cinema—such a small number of screens will struggle to be commercially viable; a project where it “may” have a cinema or “may” have some other entertainment taking up that space. Whereas, right now, we have a lease signed by the developer for a cinema that is now in its non-compliance period. There is an approved development application for a cinema on that site. It is all there; we just need the ACT government to actually enforce those lease conditions. As a rental tenant, I understand the importance of meeting my lease conditions and what will happen if I do not. I wish I could go to my landlord and say, “Sorry, I am non-compliant, but there are no financial penalties for the first four years.” Can you imagine how that would go? Yet developers seem to have this sweetheart deal.

Moving on to retailers, my team has begun engagement with retailers who are interested in expanding their footprint in Gungahlin. There are many retailers that we do not yet have in Canberra or have not yet expanded their presence to the Gungahlin district. By far the most consistent request I receive, as a representative, from the Gungahlin residents is for an electronic store such as a JB Hi-Fi. My team and I have spent the past month making representation to retailers, including JB Hi-Fi, encouraging them to open stores here. So if happens, remember, you heard it here.

I have also enjoyed meeting with many small businesses over the past few weeks to understand the issues that are affecting them. It will not surprise you to hear the most consistent concern was the cost of living and a sharp decrease in people's ability to spend. Instead of eating out a few times a week, it has become a rare treat. There is only so much smaller businesses can do to absorb this reduction in demand. It is why we need to see a greater investment in Gungahlin's economic development and continued efforts to pursue employment opportunities that would boost confidence.

Meanwhile, we have some of the most expensive rents and housing of anywhere globally. With more and more income taken up by housing costs, there is less to spend on other items. It will not surprise you that many restaurants and cafes talked about the desire to reduce their energy costs and wished to be able to enjoy the benefits of affordable renewable energy. They, however, are struggling with grid capacity to make that switch. The ACT government, Evoenergy and commercial landlords need to partner to make this possible and commit to greater access. Others wondered about

lowering or eliminating the cost of outdoor dining, where clear boundaries might create opportunities to raise more revenue from business rates or payroll tax—better to tax people whose business is a success, than to tax people before they have made a cent.

A number of businesses talked about the negative impact of cars in Hibberson Street, between Gungahlin Place and Gozzard Street. I wonder whether it is time to consider Hibberson Street as a suitable candidate for better scrutinisation, which might increase both community enjoyment and footfall. Thanks to an earlier motion of mine, the Territory Plan now includes an entertainment precinct in the Gungahlin town centre. Unfortunately this cannot be actualised at the moment, given delays in developing and releasing the noise standards for this precinct. Work has been completed on establishing the noise standards for Civic. The government should now have the experience to be able to roll those out for the Gungahlin town centre. This, of course, will require consultation with the Gungahlin residents but, once realised, it will help ensure that Gungahlin is a meeting place for everyone into the evening. It will help give business confidence to invest, develop and open, knowing there is a much-reduced chance of conflict with other building users, particularly residential.

Coming to the targets: targets concentrate the mind and focus government. I look forward to working with the government in setting targets for employment and growth in the Gungahlin district and the proportion of workforce residents in the district. I realise that to deliver this work will require a concentration of effort from ministers and the Economic Development Directorate, but the people of Gungahlin are worth this effort. I have provided ample time on this motion to report back and expect to see actions in all areas by the first sitting day in December.

In closing, Gungahlin has never lacked ambition, talent or a sense of community spirit, but it has lacked the focus of ACT government action to match its growth with employment. Our district has moved from paddocks to a city-sized community in a generation. Now it is time for the next step—jobs closer to home, a vibrant town centre and the opportunities people here deserve. I will keep working with residents, business and this Assembly to make that happen.

MR BARR (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism and Trade) (3.11), by leave: I move:

1. After paragraph (1)(c)(ii), insert:

“(iii) has undertaken community consultation on the Subdivision design elements of Gungahlin Town Centre East, gathering feedback from Gungahlin residents on the design for the expansion of the Town Centre due for release in the 2026-2027 financial year;”.

2. Omit paragraph (1)(d), substitute:

“(d) the developer of the Gungahlin cinema site has not commenced construction, noting the building and development provision in the lease requires a cinema to be built by 28 February 2024.”.

3. Omit all text after paragraph (2)(a), substitute:

“(b) release land in the Gungahlin district as outlined in the Government’s indicative land release program;

(c) ensure that residential, commercial and community zoning is appropriate

- for the district in any new land release in the Gungahlin;
- (d) consider amendments to section 99 of the Planning (General) Regulation 2023 as part of a review into lease enforcement powers;
 - (e) develop noise standards for the Gungahlin Town Centre Entertainment Precinct;
 - (f) set ambitious targets for employment growth in Gungahlin and other districts for the census years of 2031 and 2036, including as a proportion of the workforce resident in the district; and
 - (g) report back to the Assembly, by the first sitting day in December 2026, on these actions.”.

The Gungahlin region is rapidly growing and it will play an increasingly important role in north Canberra’s economic and social future. As Mr Braddock has indicated, Gungahlin is now home to around one in five Canberrans. It has been one of the fastest-growing districts in the country and is home to many younger people. The government understands that with this population growth comes opportunity—opportunity for more local services, a more lively town centre and a stronger local economy.

Between 2016 and 2021, the Australian Bureau of Statistics census showed employment in Gungahlin grew by 33 per cent, outpacing the region’s 23 per cent population growth over the same period; that jobs growth was across sectors, including construction, education and public administration; and there was additional growth in light industrial sectors in nearby Mitchell. The 2021 census confirmed a strong and growing employment base, second only to the Canberra Airport district in terms of employment growth during the census period.

The government supports further employment growth in Gungahlin. As members would be aware, there are already around 240 jobs at Defence Housing Australia’s head office in the town centre and a further 700 ACT government roles at Winyu House. The government has set a target for 300,000 jobs in the territory by 2030, recognising that achieving this will require continued economic diversification, sustained growth and a workforce with the right skills. As at January of this year, the ABS data shows total employment in the territory at around 273,000—so about 27,000 jobs to go. This is reflecting strong jobs growth not only in the public sector but also across the private sector and, particularly, in health care and education.

The polycentric nature of employment in the territory and the structure of our economy mean that the majority of residents work outside of the district that they live in. That said, more flexible working arrangements are changing this quite significantly. Flexible, hybrid and full-time work from home mean an increasing proportion of the workforce do in fact live and now work in the same district. Continued investment in our districts alongside good strategic planning will provide the enabling conditions to support further economic development and jobs growth.

At the last territory election, we set out a comprehensive plan to support Gungahlin’s growth through investment in infrastructure, services and local economic opportunities. A central focus is the expansion of the Gungahlin town centre to the east, creating additional space for commercial activity, community facilities and more affordable housing. This includes the development of a CIT campus and public library alongside

a youth-focused community centre and improved public spaces. Substantial progress has already been made on the subdivision design application for Gungahlin town centre east, supported by an established framework to guide future stages of design and planning. The application has been finalised for lodgement in mid-2026, with staged land releases planned from fiscal 2026-27 onwards. The expanded town centre will deliver new commercial opportunities, additional housing and new public spaces.

Our plan for Gungahlin also prioritises investments in large employment-generating areas, particularly health and education. This will both support service delivery and, of course, boost local employment. This includes expanded services at the Gungahlin walk-in centre and, in education, it includes a second government college in Nicholls. Obviously, there are hundreds of ACT government jobs associated with those projects. It also includes upgrades and expansions to existing schools and expansion to the Gungahlin College in the town centre, ensuring the growing population is matched with jobs and services closer to home. Together, these initiatives seek to strengthen Gungahlin as a more self-sustaining district, enhancing access to employment, improving amenity and supporting long-term economic development in line with the community's needs.

I commend to the Assembly the amendments that I have moved. They do, of course, cover areas that are in the Minister for Planning's responsibility, and he will no doubt speak in more detail to those. We are, of course, seeking the Assembly's support for the land release that is necessary for this economic development opportunity to occur. I commend my amendments, as a block, to the Assembly.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (3.16): I rise today to support Mr Braddock's motion about Gungahlin, a district that continues to grow rapidly in population but not so much in local employment opportunity. The Gungahlin Community Council's 2025 survey tells a very clear story: more than nine in 10 respondents work outside their own district and more than four in five want government action to attract commercial businesses locally. That level of consensus is rare and it reflects a lived experience of Gungahlin residents.

I note that the Territory Plan must not be inconsistent with the National Capital Plan. The National Capital Plan states in section 3.5.3, which is "Policies for Employment Location", that major employment generating land uses should be located within the defined activity centres, which includes the Gungahlin town centre. The section goes on to say that public sector office employment should be encouraged to locate in the city and the town centres. The question is: who ensures compliance with the National Capital Plan?

This motion does not ask for radical change; it asks for fairness, accountability, and ambition. It asks the government to align land release and land use policy with real employment outcomes, to review settings that are clearly not working and to finally set measurable targets so progress can be tracked and assessed. Each town centre should have what it needs to service their large populations. They should have cultural and recreation facilities and an entertainment precinct to allow noise and fun—places where like-minded people come together to form community. Gungahlin residents are not asking for special treatment; they are asking for employment and the opportunities that each town centre should enjoy. I support ambition for every town centre and thank Mr

Braddock for standing up for the Gungahlin town centre.

MR MILLIGAN (Yerrabi) (3.18): I rise today to speak to Mr Braddock's motion, as one of the Yerrabi members. No doubt a few other members will get on board today, as Ms Carrick has done. Welcome to Gungahlin. Pop up and we will have lunch.

Gungahlin will benefit from a strong town centre. At its best, Gungahlin town centre should be the beating heart of the region, supporting cafes, retailers, professional services, entertainment venues and cultural activities. It also strengthens nearby employment areas, including the important area of Mitchell.

When the town centre succeeds, the local economy also grows and succeeds. In 2025, the Gungahlin Community Council conducted a survey of the community that revealed a number of priorities, including entertainment and commercial gaps, transport challenges, infrastructure and safety concerns. Based on the survey results, 91 per cent of working residents commute outside the Gungahlin district, more than 80 per cent want more community consultation on major projects in the district, over 70 per cent believe that healthcare services in the region are inadequate, and 67 per cent request a more vibrant night-time economy.

Most people living in Gungahlin live in the region every day and commute out every day for work, but they would prefer to have options for employment in the local area. They want more local businesses, better shops and places that are open later at night. Gungahlin has not seen a great deal of development in the town centre recently. I have heard that the main concern in that area is the fact that approvals for development applications and building applications seem to be getting delayed. That loss of confidence flows directly to local businesses, which experience lower activity and fewer opportunities to grow. Residents feel the consequences as well, with fewer choices close to home and longer commutes for work, services and entertainment.

We all know that businesses start with a spark. They need building and nurturing to turn that spark into something bigger. The role of government here is to create the right economic and regulatory environment to give business room to breathe, to ensure that there is enough oxygen for them to grow that spark into a flame. When governments get the settings right, business investments naturally flow.

Supporting local businesses means making it easier and worthwhile to run a business here. That means listening to businesses, keeping rules clear and creating conditions to help them grow. When businesses have confidence, they invest. They hire people and support their local communities. Jobs do not exist because government announces them; they exist because businesses decide to take the risk to employ someone, to invest in someone and to grow the business.

The Greens say that they want to increase jobs, but they are also responsible for the current payroll tax system here, which is the most oppressive for business in Australia. Let us be clear: the payroll tax is a tax on employment.

Madam Assistant Speaker, if you take a walk down Hibberson Street, you will see that, in the town centre, there are a lot of options there. We have the major supermarkets and department stores, we have retail and specialty stores, plenty of cafes, nail salons, and

a lot of casual dining and restaurants. One thing that we do not have is one of those big-box chain stores. That would be pretty good. Mr Braddock mentioned that JB Hi-Fi would be good. We are missing some areas of business in the town centre. There are some gaps there, and we should be trying to encourage a diverse range of businesses that can also create a diverse range of employment options.

We also have healthcare services, pharmacists, child care, beauty salons and the like. Of course, we have Access Canberra out there, an ACT government department. We also have Defence Housing, a federal government agency, out there. I could probably guarantee that no-one in Gungahlin would reject an opportunity for another government department to be relocated to the area as well. It is clear that there are some gaps in Gungahlin, especially when compared to other areas of Canberra of a similar size and population.

At the same time, Mitchell also performs very strongly. It is a large employment sector. It is not just light industrial and industrial; it has retail, and it has professional services. A lot of people think Mitchell is just an industrial hub. I think that, as part of the plan going forward, if we could connect Gungahlin with Mitchell, and have those two business regions support one another, that would provide greater opportunity for people living in that area.

The main issue in the motion from Mr Braddock seems to be around jobs and employment, and I understand and support that. With Mr Barr's amendments, I notice that there are a couple of areas where he includes commercial space, as well as community facilities and residential. All of that needs to be part of the mix. I think that his amendments strengthen and go to support Mr Braddock's original motion. I do not think the amendments take anything out of the motion. As I have already indicated, Mr Barr said that there is a lot of opportunity that is coming down the track, and as part of the current land release program.

Overall, it is a good thing for Gungahlin. This sitting week has been a good one for Gungahlin, both today and tomorrow. There is good representation of Gungahlin in the chamber this week. Go, Yerrabi members! Overall, I am supporting Mr Barr's amendments to Mr Braddock's motion, and I commend it to the Assembly.

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage and Minister for Transport) (3.25): We cannot agree to Mr Braddock's motion as it stands because we cannot agree to terms that would delay the critical release of commercial land within the Gungahlin district. I would refer members to the published 2025 Housing Supply and Land Release Program, which indicates that we are planning to release over 65,000 square metres of commercial land, 75,000 square metres of land for community use, and land to enable 3,800 dwellings, including build-to-rent development, over the five-year period.

Just for 2026-27, the indicative land release for Gungahlin includes around 20,000 square metres of commercial and 10,000 square metres of community land, and a residential yield of 925 homes, all of which this motion is asking us to put a pause on and to conduct a review, which may lead to major changes to planning frameworks which have been developed in consultation with the community. The land releases in the Gungahlin town centre are already in line with the Gungahlin town centre east

design and place framework. If the Assembly really wants to support commercial opportunities and economic development, why would the solution not be to get on with the job?

While I appreciate the intention of the motion to support commercial developments in Gungahlin town centre—and we want to see the best outcomes for Gungahlin, too—we cannot support a motion that asks us to achieve that through delay, potential rezoning and redevelopment of plans that have been developed over a number of years. That would set back that land release that is planned, potentially for years.

On the one hand, it says that it is okay for the government to drag their feet on releasing land for commercial opportunities, new homes and places for community and other uses, but on the other hand it says that it is okay for the government to start charging developers and lessees noncompliance fees the moment the clock ticks over the date of any building covenant clauses in their lease.

While we are not disagreeing that there are unacceptable instances of land banking in the territory, and unclaimed and underutilised leases across the territory, including in some of the core commercial zones, we cannot agree to the calls-on part of the motion related to this without undertaking the appropriate due diligence and consideration, to avoid a perverse outcome which actually discourages investment and buy-in to our growing city.

Leases usually include a building covenant clause to complete a development within a period from the date of the lease being granted, with section 374 of the Planning Act and section 99 of the Planning (General) Regulation 2023 establishing a noncompliance fee that must be paid if development does not occur in those timeframes. Section 99 of the regulation sets this noncompliance fee as zero for the first to the fourth year of the noncompliance period.

This fee-free period was implemented through the Planning and Development (Extension of Time) Amendment Bill 2014, as part of a stimulus package implemented by the government at the time to support the local economy during a period of low private and public investment by assisting with the financial burdens being experienced when delivering a site. It is an interesting point of history for the Assembly to consider in the context of the current conflict in the Middle East and the timing of today's motion, with uncertainty for government, industry and members of the community.

The government is already investigating measures to compel land development within agreed timeframes as part of sales. This is where we will consider whether the existing noncompliance timeframes and fee settings are still appropriate, and progress amendments where we determine we need to strengthen existing, or implement new, mechanisms as part of our review into lease enforcement powers.

The amendments moved by the Chief Minister note that we are undertaking that work, and we will certainly incorporate a review of that particular regulation around noncompliance fees as part of that ongoing work. We are happy to look at it as part of that review, which will, of course, consider the policy rationale at the present time for that, and the will of the Assembly to see more commercial activity in the Gungahlin town centre.

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (3.30): It is great that this motion has come forward. I thank my colleague Mr Braddock for moving it. It is a shame that the issue of lease squatting that we find in other parts of Canberra is also hitting Gungahlin—in this particular instance, with a new cinema. Cinemas are places where people get together to be entertained. They let people be part of the night-time economy. They let them get out and mingle, and go to restaurants, cafes and bars in the town centre. There is a real social benefit, and there are real benefits in activating our places and getting lots of people out there, and in making them feel safe and welcoming.

Canberra's leasehold system is meant to provide certainty on the delivery of uses on a block of land and provide control about how that land is managed. If you buy a block of land from the territory that says you need to build on a block within a certain period of time, it is reasonable for the community to expect that that is what will happen. In most cases, that is what happens. If someone has been using a block of land for a period of time and for some reason the business fails, it is reasonable for the community to expect that somebody else, or that operator, must use that block for the purpose for which it was granted, or they can apply to change it by varying the lease.

What they cannot do is just sit on it. If a block sits idle for extended periods of time, it is not meeting our community's expectations. It is reasonable then that we take action, and that the government makes landholders and lease owners comply with the terms and conditions of the Crown lease.

This is obviously not an issue that is confined to Gungahlin. We have seen it all around Canberra, with Big Splash, Hawker tennis centre and Richardson shops. The leasehold system right now is not operating as it should. The community is getting really frustrated when they see buildings start to decay and attract antisocial behaviour. They want their Gungahlin cinema, they want their Big Splash, they want their tennis centre, and they want to know what action is being undertaken by the territory. We understand the need for natural justice, but it looks like this is slated towards the developer, not the community. The community also has a stake in this.

The system needs to be improved. We need to review the operation of the lease compliance system as it stands under the Planning Act and how it is being implemented. We need to give more confidence to our community that what the lease says is what will be built, and that if someone does not comply with their lease, reasonable action is quickly and promptly taken to address that noncompliance.

I am looking forward to the day in the not-too-distant future when I can visit my colleague Mr Braddock, and we can check out a movie at the newly opened cinema in the Gungahlin town centre, and I am looking forward to this government getting the tools it needs to make sure that the community are getting the facilities they expect.

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) (3.33): I thank Mr Braddock for bringing this motion and the Chief Minister for his amendment and giving all of us here the opportunity to speak about how we can continue to strengthen Gungahlin's economic and social development. I think there is broad agreement in this place on the

vision within the motion. We all want to see more local jobs in Gungahlin, we all want a stronger town centre and we all want more opportunities for people to work closer to home. We want the town centre to develop into a more vibrant place where people can live, work, shop, eat, have fun, get together as a community, run a business or even raise a family. We want to see Gungahlin reach its full potential.

All members in this place understand the value of a major commonwealth department being located in the Gungahlin town centre—and I am always happy to join that advocacy at every opportunity. We have, of course, had some wins. The relocation of around 300 Defence Housing Australia staff to Gungahlin in 2022 made a real difference. The ACT government has also acted by moving substantial numbers of public servants into the town centre through Winyu House. We know that workplaces like this have been the backbone of successful business districts in the ACT. We have acted on that as we can, and we will continue to do so as we can.

Everyone in this place also understands how successful a cinema would be in the Gungahlin town centre. It remains deeply frustrating that the developer who purchased the cinema site has been either unable or unwilling to deliver this important community asset. I, over the years, have sought to add pressure on the developer, and it continues to be a source of frustration for me personally and for the wider community.

All that being said, much of the important work to shape Gungahlin's future is already happening. It is informed by our engagement with community, and it is being delivered by this Labor government. Labor has a plan for Gungahlin, and we are working each and every day to deliver that plan. This government is making real investment in the town centre: a new CIT and library hub, a new community centre, new playgrounds and, most importantly, expansion of the town centre to the east. These are the building blocks of a stronger town centre and a more self-sufficient Gungahlin district. These projects create construction jobs now but they also, importantly, support permanent jobs over time. Ultimately, they make Gungahlin a more attractive place to live, to invest and to open a business. Labor is also investing in the services that make it easier for people to live more of their lives locally: a new Casey health centre, more services at the Gungahlin walk-in centre, school upgrades, a second college and education infrastructure in the town centre.

There is no one silver bullet solution to the issues in Gungahlin's growth. We need to get all of the elements correct to ensure we have a district with the right infrastructure, services and amenity that support more jobs, activity and community connection over time. While the success of the town centre is vital for Gungahlin residents, it is not the only place in Gungahlin where we want to see the community come together. It is not the only place where we want to create jobs or see small businesses succeed. I have heard and continue to hear amazing success stories from small businesses in all of the local shopping precincts of Gungahlin. Gungahlin is full of thriving local shops.

I would like to place on the record my thanks to the Gungahlin Community Council for their advocacy and for their work to deliver the Gungahlin community survey. Their work to gather the views of the community helps us as members of this place direct our energy to pressing issues faced by the community. Their advocacy does not go unheard. The survey results, along with the many conversations I have directly with residents, businesses and community groups, all help me to do my job better. I appreciate that the

survey results show many Gungahlin residents travel outside the district for work. I think everyone in this place recognises the benefits of working close to home. But we should also recognise that Canberra is still a small city and our city has many and varied opportunities across it. A modern career will span many workplaces across the full breadth of our city. Tradespeople, health workers, teachers and many others do not work in one fixed location across their career. I raise this simply to highlight that working across the city and its various districts is normal. Not everyone can or would be working close to their home.

That is why it is important to highlight that Labor is improving the way people move around our city. We have a plan for more frequent buses and road upgrades. I think our ambition should be even bigger than just this motion. Not only do I want more Gungahlin residents to be able to work in Gungahlin, but I also want to see more people from other parts of Canberra commuting to Gungahlin, working there, socialising and hopefully even doing a bit more shopping. My colleague Minister Steel loves to tell his constituents that we are building light rail to Woden. He is not wrong, but I think it is important that we are also giving Woden residents access to light rail to Gungahlin.

I want Gungahlin to be a district with a purpose for all Canberrans. Labor is building the social and economic infrastructure to make this happen, Labor is building the transport infrastructure to genuinely connect our city to make this happen and Labor is building the modern transport infrastructure to genuinely connect our city. I, like my constituents, love Gungahlin. It is vibrant and it is growing. I want to see more jobs for locals, more opportunity for business and a town centre that continues to grow. That is what we are working to deliver. Labor has a plan for Gungahlin, and we are putting that plan into action.

MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi) (3.40): I rise today to discuss the wonderful district of Gungahlin and acknowledge the contribution that Mr Milligan has made. He talked about long commutes for work and entertainment and the fact that we just need to get the settings right for business to flourish and thrive. So, instead of covering the same ground, I want to talk about the broader context for this debate. On the face of it, this debate, like so many in this place, is about a frustration felt by residents of a local community and the hope that the Assembly and the government will do something about it. But, when you look a little deeper, this debate is really about the decisions that this Labor government has taken and how they have failed our community.

The decision I am talking about is Labor's conception of the territory as one city. Everyone can see the emotional appeal of treating Canberra as a united, integrated city-state, but the reality of this policy is that it concentrates the most desirable amenities, services and infrastructure in the centre of the territory while everyone else, like the residents of Gungahlin and surrounding suburbs, go without. It is worth asking ourselves why Labor has embraced this one-city policy. It is certainly not because of its electoral appeal. Most members would know how desperately people in Gungahlin, Belconnen, Woden and Tuggeranong hate how centralised Canberra has become and how much they need to travel across the city to access services and amenities. The feeling of unfairness becomes more visceral every kilometre you go from Civic.

It is also not a policy Labor have embraced out of ideology. If anything, it is contrary to their ideology. They are a social democratic party, and there is nothing socially

democratic about prioritising services, amenities and infrastructure in the more affluent parts of Canberra. It is, in fact, the polar opposite of what their philosophy demands from a Labor government. No; the reason Labor have embraced this policy is because they have no other options. They are broke and so they cannot afford any other approach. I have been broke. It is rough. In those circumstances, you have to make choices that you do not love. You have to go without. You have to make do—and that is the choice that Labor are making for Canberra. Communities are going without and having to make do because Labor have mismanaged the budget. Since Labor cannot afford to build quality amenities all around Canberra, they have to put it somewhere where it is accessible to everyone. So everything goes into the city centre, which means the territory has become highly centralised, and this centralisation will only get worse with time.

The infrastructure is here in the city, the amenities are here and the jobs are here, so people have to come in for work but also for entertainment, hospitality, festivals and for culture, which is great if you can afford to live in Civic, Campbell, Dickson, Braddon and all of those central areas. But all of that extra travel on our roads and transport systems is putting them under pressure that they were never meant to bear, and it means our local communities have become dormitory suburbs. Local shops, cafes, restaurants and pubs all struggle to survive. These are the inevitable consequences of Labor transforming Canberra into a more centralised city.

I doubt anyone actually wants this policy. If we were not so broke, we would be embracing the original vision of Canberra as a patchwork of vibrant local districts and towns. We would ensure that each of our town centres have the amenities, infrastructure and services to support their local communities and that they have the businesses, offices and organisations to ensure that there are local employment opportunities for people. This was the vision of the Burley Griffins. It is a vision that still suits Canberra today and it is a vision that the people and the parties of Canberra should embrace—a vision we would embrace if only we were not so broke.

The good news is that this is still a vision we can embrace, and we can realise once we get the budget under control. We can accept that it is unrealistic to expect so many Canberrans to travel to the inner suburbs each day. We can invest in developing our communities so that people can access amenities, services and businesses locally. We can turn back the clock on two decades of centralisation. The bad news is that the budget is still getting worse day by day and Labor has no plan to get us back on track. So it could be a very long time before we are in a position to restore vibrant local communities around Canberra, which means that the unfairness that is baked into Labor's one-city policy is going to endure. The people of Yerrabi will continue to be short-changed when it comes to the essential services and infrastructure they deserve, and the same is true for the residents of places like Tuggeranong, Oaks Estate and even the future residents of Molonglo.

As local members, we can continue to highlight specific concerns and advocate for change. When we fight for things like local amenities, jobs and upgrades, public transport improvements, a new police station, better local health care and so much more, we might even have some success from time to time, as the government accepts the need for piecemeal improvements, as we heard from the Minister for City Services this morning. But the truth is that real systemic change is only going to come when we

abandon the one-city policy and return to a more equitable, more local vision for Canberra.

As Mr Milligan said, we will be supporting the government's amendments today. I think they are sensible. I am thrilled to hear that Labor do have a plan for Gungahlin—I am heartened to hear it—but I would like them to get a wriggle-on, if we could. When we think of the college, my daughter was there six years ago, and it was bursting at the seams then. These things could happen quicker. We have heard about health facilities and expansion for fire and emergency and police—all these things that do bring jobs, vibrancy, safety and security to our local area. I know the government have talked about planning and things like that. When we look at mixed-use buildings—and I have a question on notice for Minister Steel—I think it is important to look at parking for delivery drivers, Australia Post and things like that. These are the things that will encourage business and more employment opportunities. So, yes, I am very happy to be supporting the government's amendments today. I thank Mr Braddock and everybody for their contributions today.

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) (3.46): I want to add my sentiments to what is, I think, the mass love of all the members for Yerrabi for the Gungahlin town centre, even if we still want more, because we always want more.

In this discussion, there has been quite a bit of focus on jobs, as per the motion, and having more employment within the town centre, but we have also touched on a range of other factors, including services and, of course, the cinema and other entertainment options. One thing that I would like to add to the discussion, without repeating too much of what others have said, is the investment that Labor has made, particularly in the time that I have been in this place, which is looking to meet that need within our community.

We have seen things like the health centre and the addition of the nurse-led walk-in centre, which I must admit I have probably used more times than one would like to admit, including the time I accidentally slipped and shoved a cotton bud in my ear, and had to get it checked out because I had ripped something. That service is very useful for the community. It is always in use, if the wait times and the number of people there are any indication, and it has been embraced by our community as a vital service that is provided.

I also draw members' attention to the community centre which is currently under construction. This is something I have been working on during the whole time I have been here, and that Labor committed to in the 2020 election. It was subsequently funded over the last term of government, and we will be delivering it very shortly.

This is a really exciting addition to our town centre. Having done the walkthrough now, I think people in the community will be really enthused by what is there. It is high quality and it meets our needs. The design has been based on the brief that was provided by the community, that we worked up. It has a good, large kitchen area, in order to cater for events within the community, so that we can have a lot of diverse cuisines come in and a lot of people in the kitchen at the same time. We all know that food is at the heart

of any occasion.

It has a dedicated youth centre, which will be incredibly important for our community, given that we are a younger community, but we are growing up. There are meeting rooms, where services can come in and provide more personal engagement, whether it is counselling or other types of community health services; we can look at accommodating that.

There is a dance area with a spring floor, which will be great for all our community-related events and all the practice that is involved. There are also spaces for music. There is what we call a dirty arts area, which involves all the wet things, like painting, pottery and clay, and lots of space to store those.

This will make an incredibly positive contribution to our town centre and bring that activity together, having regard to what we see going on. That also reflects a lot of the other things that we have seen change within our town centre over the years. There are a lot more cafes, restaurants and eating places, and we will continue to see those flourish, as there is a community there, coming from the Marketplace, which is the main shopping centre provided. This will help certain parts of the precinct to be enlivened, and to be those eat streets and those places where we can come together as a community.

We have also seen, in the time that I have been here, an additional level added to the Marketplace. It shows that the retail footing that we have there is growing, and that it is meeting the community needs. That has been well embraced by our community as well.

In looking at this motion, while there is always more that we can do, and we can have a chat about jobs and different ways that we can attract employment, it is probably also important to think about the work opportunities that we have within the ACT. We have always focused on moving public service jobs to Gungahlin. In thinking about how we can continue to encourage employment opportunities within the town centre, it is probably time to start to think a little more broadly than that. I note that the government has fewer levers for those places that are not directly involved in its remit. We need to acknowledge that we do not have the work economy of the NCDC days; we have a different one. We probably need to make sure that we are reflecting that in our ambitions.

On the cinema—this long-discussed cinema—and going back to my comments on the community centre, one thing that is really exciting about the community centre is that there is a lot of audiovisual material there that can be used—screens and so forth. While we continue to debate a cinema and what should or should not happen, there is potential for us to at least be able to have some movie nights or screenings of other events, such as important sports games, that come up within our community.

There are possibilities there. We can always aspire to have more; but, in adding to this part of the debate, I would note that it is not all bad news, and that we do have a pretty nifty town centre and a pretty great community, and we will continue to support that through what we do.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (3.52): In speaking to the amendments and in closing, I

would like to thank all members here today for having a good and productive debate about the future of the Gungahlin town centre. Whilst I do not exactly love the government's amendments, I recognise the numbers here, in that the Liberals and Labor have indicated their support for them.

One of my key concerns is that there is a high level of community angst, particularly about the planning regulation, in terms of enforcing the conditions of leases. I appreciate the points put forward by the minister in terms of a review being underway. I welcome that, and I hope that it will be able to lead to a significant change on behalf of the Canberra community, because the community are saying very loudly and clearly that they no longer support lease squatting and land being unproductive for extended periods of time, to the detriment of the community.

In terms of the other amendments put forward by the government, including the inclusion of community spaces, retail and residential, I appreciate those inclusions. I want to stress that the community do not want to see examples of mixed-use development where you might have, say, 10 storeys of apartments, with only one level of retail. That does not provide enough of an employment base. That is just the creation of further dormitory suburbs. We already have plenty of that type of development in Gungahlin, and too many of those retail spaces are vacant. We need to make sure that we activate the town centre so that we can have employment, and people accessing services and enjoying their local town centre.

I would like to thank everyone for their contributions. We need to ensure that we produce a town centre in which people wish to work, live and reside. I would like to thank you all for your contributions. I love Gungahlin, not because it is perfect, but I can see its full potential. Gungahlin's many areas of medium density housing showcase a vision of a city that offers the best of both worlds—the feeling of a bush capital with the amenities of a vibrant urban environment.

Now that the ACT government has put hard boundaries on Canberra's future growth, we need to make it denser, so that the city actually works, now and in the decades to come. Part of that is about ensuring that our suburbs are not just sterile bedroom communities where people sleep at night, but places where they can live full, satisfying and active lives.

Mr Barr's amendments agreed to.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Public housing—debt to commonwealth

MR PARTON (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (3.55): I, and also on behalf of Mr Cocks, move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that the:

- (a) ACT carries a \$66 million historic housing debt to the Commonwealth;
- (b) historic housing debt was determined under the then Labor

- Commonwealth Government;
- (c) underlying housing liability was accumulated under the then Labor Commonwealth Government before ACT self-government; and
 - (d) historic housing debt was inherited from the Commonwealth Government under terms determined by the Commonwealth Government;
- (2) acknowledges that other state and territory governments have had historical housing-related debts waived, including:
- (a) \$320 million in South Australian debt in 2013; and
 - (b) \$157 million in Tasmanian debt in 2019;
- (3) further notes that:
- (a) the ACT's Labor Senator and former ACT Chief Minister Katy Gallagher campaigned to waive the ACT Government's housing debt during the 2022 federal election campaign;
 - (b) Senator Gallagher in Senate Estimates on 22 October 2019 said to Senator Seselja as Assistant Minister for Finance, in respect to waiving the ACT's historic housing debt, "you're in a position of power. You get to sign it off.";
 - (c) Senator Gallagher has been the federal Minister for Finance since 2022; and
 - (d) as the Minister for Finance, ACT Senator Gallagher has refused to waive the Territory's historic housing debt; and
- (4) condemns Senator Gallagher for her sustained failure to waive the ACT's historic housing debt.

On 19 October 2022, I moved a motion in this place. The motion called for the leaders of all parties represented in this Assembly at that time—that being Labor, Liberals and the Greens—to write to the finance minister condemning in the strongest terms her backflip on her pre-election promise to waive our housing debt, and to call on the finance minister to waive the historic housing debt. Not a great deal has changed in the last 3½ years, other than a hell of a lot of ACT ratepayers' money has gone to service this debt.

At the time that I moved that motion in October 2022, the housing debt stood at \$98.3 million owed to the federal government. In the motion that I moved, I spoke of the fact that this was not without precedent from both sides of politics; that, in 2013, South Australia had \$320 million worth of debt waived by the federal Labor government and, in 2019, Tasmania had \$157 million in debt waived by the federal coalition government.

I need to furnish some further details from that motion from 3½ years ago, because they remain extremely pertinent today. In that motion of October 2022, I noted that, in opposition, Labor Senator Katy Gallagher was critical of the federal coalition government for not having waived the ACT's historic housing debt. Senator Gallagher campaigned to waive the ACT government's \$98.3 million housing debt during the 2022 federal election campaign. She went to voters and said, "Hey, this is what I'm going to work on. This is what I'm going to do."

Furthermore, Senator Katy Gallagher, in Senate estimates on 22 October 2019, said to then Senator Zed Seselja, as Assistant Minister for Finance, in respect of waiving the ACT's historic housing debt, "You are in a position of power. You get to sign it off." The Chief Minister, Mr Barr, stated on 24 October 2019—and I will quote him directly, because it is a good quote:

I would observe that it is an odd state of affairs when a crossbench senator from Tasmania can achieve more through a Liberal government than an ACT Liberal senator who is a member of the government executive as an assistant minister ...

He was referring to Senator Seselja. That was Mr Barr in 2019. We now have a situation where, of course, Senator Gallagher is the finance minister, and we have more Labor members than we can poke a stick at.

The motion that I moved back in 2022 called on the leaders of all parties represented in the Assembly to write to the finance minister condemning in the strongest terms her backflip on her pre-election promise, and to call on the finance minister to waive the historic ACT housing debt. That was pretty clear.

At the core of the motion then, as is the case now, is the premise that the government and Senator Gallagher cannot have it both ways, because the long-term debt was so desperately important when Scott Morrison was the Prime Minister. When ScoMo was the Prime Minister, when Zed Seselja was an ACT senator, this was one of the most important things in this space, according to Labor. They were being held back, they told us. They were being held back by the evil LNP. It was the federal Liberals who were stopping the ACT reaching its potential. It was the uncaring conservatives who were stopping the ACT reaching its potential in the housing space.

In 2022, it was really important, until the election of the Labor government; then, all of a sudden, these matters were just "outside our control". It just was not important. It just reeks of the most extreme political hypocrisy, and it must be called out.

In February 2020, Mr Barr made a statement regarding the housing debt and the commonwealth's move to set aside Tasmania's own state housing debt. I will remind Mr Barr of what he said. He said:

It is entirely untenable for the Commonwealth to do one special deal with Tasmania and leave the rest of the country out. That just won't stand politically.

And I kind of agree with him. In the federal election campaign that we allude to in this motion, and in some further statements from Senator Gallagher, the summary of the discussion, if we want to summarise it to a couple of sentences, was, "The Liberals don't care about people and Labor does." That is pretty much what was stated. The summary of the discussion was that, if you change the government and if you put the caring people in charge, it is a foregone conclusion that this debt would be waived.

It turns out that that is not the case, despite all the grandstanding from Senator Gallagher, and from Senator Pocock, it must be said, because there was a seat for him on the bandwagon; don't worry about that. Despite all the rhetoric about the utopia that Canberra would become once we got rid of Senator Seselja, in the space that we are debating here today, the only thing that has changed is the amount that is owing, because

millions of taxpayers' dollars have gone to service this debt.

We think it is time, certainly, to condemn Senator Gallagher, and we think it is also time that the debt was repaid. I look forward to the amendments coming from Mr Rattenbury and Ms Berry, and I look forward to the contribution coming from Mr Cocks.

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (4.02): Mr Parton and I have brought this motion today the Canberra Liberals believe it is important for this Legislative Assembly to stand on its own feet and to fight for Canberra, not to be sidelined slavishly to the opinions, policies, narratives and the spin of the federal Labor Party. It is not the first time this Assembly has debated the question of Labor's legacy housing debt—Mr Parton raised one of the instances—but it is time that the Assembly came together to take the strongest possible stance on the issue.

At the start of self-government, the ACT Legislative Assembly—and, indeed, ACT self-government—was handed a bundle of costs and problems that were essentially inconvenient for the federal Labor government of the day; costs the people of Canberra had no say in determining and no ability to refuse. I will always be an advocate for the ACT's right to self-determination. At the same time, that process which imposed self-government on Canberra with little respect for Canberrans and the liabilities that the Labor government of the day was handing on has left a legacy that we continue to feel today. This so-called historic housing debt is one of those legacies.

Right at the start of self-government, as the Legislative Assembly was finding its feet during a tumultuous first Assembly, the Hawke-Keating Labor government handed us a debt of roughly \$300 million. That is close to \$850 million in today's money. It locked us into a decades-long revenue stream for the commonwealth. That debt has been a burden on the ACT for too long, and it still has a real impact, costing Canberrans millions of dollars every year. The between \$8 million and \$11 million of principal and interest costs that the government will pay by the end of this financial year—this financial year—could have covered the build cost of 25 to 30 efficiently built sustainable new homes. Instead, it is being handed on to the federal government. If you look across the course of this agreement, Canberra could have built around \$1 billion worth of housing. But that money has instead been handed over to the commonwealth—the commonwealth, who has so much of the revenue-raising ability already.

It is important to look at this in the context of the federal government and the federal government's ability to raise money and their budget. The federal government's total expenses are now in the vicinity of \$1 trillion per year. In comparison, waiving Labor's legacy housing debt would cost less than 0.007 per cent of that budget. In terms of the payments that we make to the commonwealth each year, we are talking about the commonwealth forgoing roughly 0.001 per cent of the revenue they would otherwise receive. In the context of the federal budget, it is important to understand this is not even a rounding error; the federal government could waive this debt with a stroke of a pen with zero impact, effectively, to their budget. It would not fix Labor's budget mess here, but it would help. We debated this issue on multiple occasions last term in motions brought by the Canberra Liberals and motions brought by the Greens—which gained unanimous agreement in this chamber, albeit at times in amended form—that called for that debt to be waived and calling for the leaders of parties to write to the federal

government. But none of Labor's supposed advocacy has yielded anything—none of the supposed advocacy from ACT Labor and none of the supposed advocacy from our federal representatives.

It is important to understand how long Labor have been failing Canberra on this. ACT Senator and Minister for Finance, Ms Gallagher, was ACT Treasurer during a period of federal Labor governance. Ms Gallagher, ACT Senator and Minister for Finance, was Chief Minister during a period of federal Labor governance and, when federal Labor waived a debt for South Australia, she basically stood in this chamber and simply noted it. ACT Treasurer Gallagher did not fight for a waiver of the debt. ACT Chief Minister Gallagher did not fight for a waiver of the debt. It was not until Senate candidate and then Senator Gallagher had been lined up for that safe ACT Senate seat that she suddenly had an awakening on a legacy injustice that should be fixed. And we agree: it should be fixed. It said something about the way Labor treats Canberra, though: that, unless there is a federal Liberal government in place, standing up for Canberra seems to come second to the interests of federal Labor and the Labor agenda itself.

As we debate this motion today, the question every Labor elected representative needs to ask themselves is: is it more important to stand up for Canberra or to protect the federal Labor machine? On this side of the chamber, we are unashamedly pro-Canberra. I commend the motion to the Assembly.

MS BARRY (Ginninderra) (4.08): I too rise to speak to this motion and to put on record a few reflections. Prior to coming to this place, I really did not understand politics. I did not understand it at all. Looking at the scenario, I still do not think I understand politics. Listening to Mr Parton's speech explains why I will probably never understand politics. I do not have the deep background knowledge of how the debate about this issue has transpired in this place. When I look at the issue and I look at the motion, I ask: why would we have a territory Labor government and a federal Labor government and have a debt of \$66 million—and accruing interest? I think it was \$200 million when we took over the debt. So why would we not have this debt waived? The only thing I can think of is that the ACT is not a marginal seat, and so there is really no need, really, for the federal Labor government to do anything at all for the ACT.

Mr Cocks: You do understand.

MS BARRY: Well, maybe I do understand politics then. As Mr Cocks said, \$66 million is a rounding figure—well, not even a rounded figure; it is a full stop in the budget for some of us who have done commonwealth budgeting. So I do not understand why it remains an issue that we have to debate in 2026. Let me put that figure in context. If we are going by the commonwealth's Australia Future Fund and the estimates for how much and how many buildings that fund would build, \$66 million plus the interest would build us around 100 homes. If we are talking about the debt we inherited, we would be having hundreds of social housing homes being built. That is the context.

This motion is necessary to provide both historic context on the housing debt and a motivation to act on it. It condemns the former Chief Minister of the ACT, now a senator for the ACT, Katy Gallagher, for reneging on her previous calls for the federal finance minister to sign off on wiping the ACT historic housing debt. This has been canvassed extensively. I would really encourage members on the other side to ask her

to do it, because she banged on in this place about how it was setting us back and, a few years on, we still have not heard anything from her. It is really interesting to see how Canberrans are treated by this Labor government. It is really interesting to watch this debate. Like I said, this is a rounding figure in the budget. It is not even a rounding figure.

It is really important that this motion is also about articulating the logical case for why the ACT historical housing debt should be wiped off, because the government has clearly failed to do the advocating for it. When we compare the ACT housing debt to the far more substantial housing-related debt of South Australia and Tasmania, which have been waived, the reasonable question is: why do we keep calling for the government to do this, without action? They proved that, when politicians do their job and do not shy away from having uncomfortable conversations because of political interests, you can get results. Senator Lambie did that. So it is not impossible. There is a precedent for it.

Canberrans are sick and tired of the government telling us that conversations are ongoing. These conversations are obviously not productive, because they are not providing any results to us here in the territory. Public housing residents are also clearly fed up and apparently, according to this government, the longer we wait to clear these debts, the longer the neglect of public housing continues. We currently have over 3,700 applications—not applicants but applications, because we do not count the number of applicants in one application; we only count the application. So you can have close to 5,000 people who are seeking social housing at this very moment on the waiting list waiting to be housed and, in the same breath, we have money which can go towards building more social housing stock—hundreds of social housing stock sitting there with the government refusing to act.

This motion helps to plainly put a strong case forward by exposing some of the history surrounding the issue and putting pressure on the government to step up, as Canberrans deserve and expect it to. I am genuinely committed to this task. The territory government cannot accept no for an answer. The reality is that housing debt plays a role in the government's neglect of public housing—or at least supposedly so. If the government wants to fix public housing with any sense of urgency, it should fearlessly try to wipe these debts. We saw photos in the *Canberra Times* last week of the ACT Chief Minister standing side by side with, I think, the Treasurer. These are two people who have, at one point or another, supported the imperative to wipe the debts. These are two people who now have the power to facilitate that waiver and two people who represent Canberrans. You would think that that alone would be enough to waive this debt for Canberrans.

This motion is really important. It is important to Canberrans. It is important to Lisa, Melissa, Carla and Leon, who are currently on the waiting list waiting for social housing. It is quite unfair that you have a Labor territory government and a commonwealth Labor government and we are still having this debate about waiving that debt. Once again, I thank the Leader of the Opposition and Mr Cocks for bringing this motion forward. I commend the motion to the Assembly.

MS BERRY (Ginninderra—Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Education and Early Childhood, Minister for Homes, Homelessness and New Suburbs and Minister for Sport

and Recreation) (4.16): I thank Mr Parton and Mr Cocks for the motion and their continued interest in Canberra's social housing. Members may remember discussing this exact topic during our last Assembly. While the ACT government would obviously love this debt to be waived, it has not stopped us and we are not waiting for this to occur. Our focus remains on building and strengthening Canberra's housing portfolio.

As we have discussed in this chamber many times, there are significant challenges in addressing housing and rental affordability in Canberra and across Australia, but the ACT government is getting on with the job of strengthening social housing through increasing, growing and renewing the territory's public housing stock, and, in turn, reducing homelessness and contributing to a safer, stronger and more inclusive Canberra city.

Over 2,000 homes have been built or bought over the last decade or so, which means that 20 per cent of our housing stock has been renewed. While I have been housing minister, we have almost reached our goal of 400 new, additional public housing properties, because ACT Labor believes that everyone deserves a safe, secure and accessible place to call home. It is why ACT Labor is building more than 30,000 homes by 2030. With these, we will be delivering 5,000 additional public, community and affordable rentals in the ACT and increasing the Housing ACT portfolio to 13,200 homes by the end of 2030.

This Assembly condemning Senator Katy Gallagher will not result in our housing debt being waived. It needs to be called out for what it is today: it is a mean and aggressive personal attack on one of Canberra's longstanding and respected political leaders. Frankly, it is a lazy approach to addressing what is a challenging issue across not just the ACT but also the country. I feel that it is a bit of a waste of everybody's time this afternoon. I am embarrassed by what people in our community will think about the Assembly's debate this afternoon when it comes to making personal attacks on our federal colleagues. I believe a more constructive approach, as proposed in my amendment—which I will move in a moment—will see the ACT government continuing to advocate for the commonwealth to waive the debt.

It is also important to acknowledge that, in the past five years, the Labor government has provided unprecedented funding for social and affordable housing to states and territories. This includes \$10 billion for the Housing Australia Future Fund, \$2 billion for the Social Housing Accelerator Fund, \$1.5 billion for the National Housing Infrastructure Facility, and \$10 billion for first home buyers. The commonwealth government has also set record housing targets through the National Housing Accord, which demonstrates an unprecedented level of commitment to pushing all states and territories to increase the supply right across the housing continuum.

In comparison, what did the Liberal coalition achieve? In government, they built, across the whole country, 373 social housing homes in the nine years that they led the commonwealth government—across the whole country, 373 social housing homes. I would say that is an un-achievement. It is pathetic. They barely had an active housing minister during the time—certainly not a formal ministers' COAG or housing ministers' meetings. They certainly did not have the ear of the federal parliament leadership team or the Prime Minister, and it was definitely not a priority at the time. And, during that time, I did not hear any condemnation of any of the ministers in that

government by the Canberra Liberals or the Greens party.

Under the Housing Australia Future Fund alone in this government, the commonwealth will be contributing \$500 million for the community housing sector to build more than 800 homes. Regarding that, I understand that the Greens did not support the fund as it initially stood. It was, in fact, delayed by seven months. However, that delay was not condemned by the ACT Greens party. I understand that the ACT Greens party have an amendment to this motion: to not just include Katy Gallagher but all of her ACT Labor federal colleagues. That is also quite concerning and an interesting approach to achieving outcomes in the ACT for people who need support. In round 2 of the Housing Australia Future Fund, there is \$60 million of commonwealth support for the construction of 85 social housing dwellings by the ACT government.

The ACT government has raised the debt formally with the commonwealth government—with both the previous coalition government and the current Labor government—in 16 letters, as well as numerous meetings and forums with both current and previous governments. And, as recently as last week, as you would all know, I asked again. I have never, and I know the Chief Minister has never, let the opportunity pass us by.

There have also been multiple Assembly resolutions in this place, including the recent resolution on 3 September last year. As at 30 June 2025, the principal outstanding debt was \$65.947 million. This will reduce to \$56.73 million from 30 June 2025, following this financial year's annual principal payments. Interest for this debt was \$3.295 million in 2024-25 and will be \$2.923 million in 2025-26.

I table the following paper:

ACT historic housing debt principal balances and interest paid from financial years ending 30 June 2000 to 30 June 2026—Table, undated.

MS BERRY: The ACT government obviously supports the waiver, in line with those that have been provided to other jurisdictions. It would support the ability for the ACT to continue to invest even further in housing. Our most recent advocacy outside of the last week includes a direct attempt made by the ACT government to the federal Minister for Housing in November last year. I do not think members would be surprised that condemning a minister and, indeed, her colleagues as well, would not result in a positive outcome, as the Canberra Liberals and, I understand, the Greens party are suggesting today.

Mr Parton: Is that the Greens political party or—

MS BERRY: Well, they are a political party. Let's not deny it. It is a fact. Whether they behave like that is another thing. It is a chance to personally attack long-term federal politicians who have represented people in the ACT for many years, and many are highly respected. I find that pretty offensive. What we see is federal Labor's focus on working with the states and territories and increasing housing supply, including social and affordable housing, including through the Housing Australia Future Fund, as I said. It is exactly what I called for the entire time that the federal coalition government was in power: support for the ACT, and small territories like us, through a range of

different funding opportunities, like the federal Labor government has done, would mean that we could grow housing across a range of different continuums. That is exactly what the federal Labor government has done.

Wouldn't it be novel here in the ACT, where ACT Labor has made a commitment to deliver 5,000 affordable social and community houses, for all of the political parties and Independents to engage together in a collegiate way—a way in which we would actually be able to achieve this goal—and be a bit less aggressive in their approach. We are seeing an example of an aggressive approach today. I believe that is something that our community would truly appreciate: political parties in the ACT actually working together to achieve the goals that the ACT government has set for itself, rather than spending time on a motion like this, condemning and personally attacking federal Labor politicians and wasting everybody's time, when we could be working together on achieving housing outcomes for people here in the ACT. I believe that our focus and our priority should be in that place: building more homes for Canberrans and looking out for some of our most vulnerable residents.

As I said, I understand that the Greens will be moving an amendment which suggests a condemnation of Senator Gallagher and her colleagues. ACT Labor will not be supporting that amendment to Mr Parton and Mr Cocks's motion. As I said, I have suggested a much more sensible and productive approach, and I am open to that continuing to be investigated by parties. I am happy to work with them about doing that.

I seek leave to move amendment No 1 circulated in my name.

Leave granted.

MS BERRY: I move:

After all text in paragraph (1)(d), insert:

- “(e) in the past five years, the Labor Commonwealth Government has provided unprecedented funding for social and affordable housing to states and territories, including the \$10 billion Housing Australia Future Fund, \$2 billion Social Housing Accelerator Fund, \$1.5 billion National Housing Infrastructure Facility and the \$10 billion First Home Buyers fund;
- (f) the Commonwealth Government has also set record housing targets, through the National Housing Accord, which demonstrates an unprecedented level of commitment to increasing supply right across the housing continuum;”.

That is exactly the kind of approach of working together more that we could have in this place to achieve our housing outcomes. It would be great to see more of it.

I will end my speech there. I just say that we do not support condemnation of Senator Gallagher and her colleagues but support a more collegiate approach of politics in the ACT—one where we work together on achieving the ACT government's goals.

Ms Berry's amendment No 1 agreed to.

MS BERRY (Ginninderra—Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Education and Early Childhood, Minister for Homes, Homelessness and New Suburbs and Minister for Sport and Recreation) (4.29), by leave: I move amendment No 2:

Omit all text in paragraph (4), substitute:

“(4) calls on the Commonwealth Government to waive the ACT’s historic housing debt”.

Question put:

That **Ms Berry’s** amendment No 2 be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 8

Noes 12

Andrew Barr

Yvette Berry

Suzanne Orr

Marisa Paterson

Michael Pettersson

Chris Steel

Caitlin Tough

Taimus Werner-Gibbings

Chiaka Barry

Andrew Braddock

Peter Cain

Leanne Castley

Jo Clay

Ed Cocks

Thomas Emerson

Jeremy Hanson

James Milligan

Laura Nuttall

Mark Parton

Shane Rattenbury

Question resolved in the negative.

Ms Berry’s amendment No 2 negatived.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (4.35): I am pleased to have an opportunity to speak to this motion today. It is a very important issue. We are in the grip of a housing crisis, and I think a lot of people would be quite distressed that actions taking place half a world away will likely exacerbate this crisis. The crisis is felt keenly across all sectors but, for people on low incomes who rely on public, community and affordable housing, the impact of the housing crisis is especially keenly felt.

I do note the programs and initiatives that have been put in place by the territory and commonwealth governments to support the growth of housing in these sectors. Notwithstanding these efforts, we have seen the total number of people on the public housing waiting list continue to grow. At the same time, we are starting to see growth in public housing stock after decades of insufficient investment.

I understand that the genesis of the debt that we are talking about today, the debt to the commonwealth, goes back to the introduction of self-government. Some of the debt was due to low-cost loans provided by the commonwealth to support the delivery of housing services to vulnerable people. The way that the debt was packaged together means that the ACT government will be paying off this debt until the 2040s; that is my understanding of the arrangements. Unlike a standard mortgage, I believe that the loan terms are inflexible, and it is not possible to pay out the loan earlier. This seems to me to place the territory in a position where the interest payments will greatly exceed the

initial quantum of the loan, given the period of time and the ongoing repayments.

The only way to get out of this arrangement is for the commonwealth to forgive the debt. I do not know for how long the territory has been approaching the commonwealth about forgiving the debt, but I would imagine that, every time a housing accord or agreement was negotiated between the commonwealth and the territory in the past, this matter would have been raised. I do know that members of this place have been very keen to come to an arrangement that sees it forgiven, particularly in light of what is happening in other jurisdictions. I will come back to that.

Certainly, the question of the debt has been debated in the last two Assemblies, and I am pleased to see that the Chief Minister and the minister for housing have committed to redirecting the servicing cost towards new or expanded housing and homelessness services, in the event that the housing debt is forgiven. That certainly should incentivise the commonwealth, to know that the money will not just go into consolidated revenue or be spent on something else, but that it will be directed towards housing.

I certainly commend the Chief Minister for his efforts in trying to get the housing debt forgiven. I have no doubt that he has been vigilant in using whatever opportunity presents itself to raise the matter with the commonwealth. To date these requests have, regrettably, fallen on deaf ears, despite the fact that the commonwealth has decided to forgive the housing debt incurred by South Australia and Tasmania, as has already been noted.

The waiver of the ACT public housing debt was raised with the then Assistant Minister for Finance, Senator Seselja, by then Senator Gallagher, about being in a position of influence on the waiving of the territory's public housing debt. The media reported that Ms Gallagher used Senate estimates "to hit Senator Seselja up for a deal similar to the one struck by Tasmanian Senator Jacqui Lambie in exchange for her help to pass the coalition's tax cut package". Senator Seselja said no. This is all history that has been discussed today.

I understand that, during the 2022 election campaign, Senator Gallagher supported the removal of the public housing debt. Despite showing all this support for the public housing debt to be waived, when asked by the Chief Minister and minister for housing to forgive the debt, as the Minister for Finance, Senator Gallagher said the same thing as Senator Seselja. She said no, she has continued to say no, and she certainly has not delivered it for the ACT. The ACT Greens support the waiving of the public housing debt, subject to the remaining principal and interest being redirected back into the public housing system.

We have had a bit of a discussion today about the various amendments, and it is worth reflecting on some of the comments that have been made in the chamber. Let us start with the minister for housing, who did what she has done in this place before. She went back to the Housing Australia Future Fund Bill and said, "Those damn Greens; they had the audacity to continue to negotiate." They had the temerity to stand up to the Albanese Labor government and say, "We need more money for housing." The tone very much was, "How dare you?" She says, "You delayed it for seven months. It's an outrage."

In making those comments, as she always does, she neglected to reflect on the fact that the consequence of those negotiations was an extra billion dollars put into the HAFF. That was the outcome of the negotiations by the Greens, and \$50 million of that went directly to the ACT, if I remember my numbers correctly. That is literally extra homes in the ACT because the Greens said what was being put forward by the federal government at the time, the Albanese government, was not sufficient.

I am surprised that the minister continues to find this outrageous, given the additional money that flowed for housing in Australia generally, and specifically the extra \$50 million that came to the ACT. Personally, I am grateful that my Senate colleagues hung out and continued to negotiate, because we are getting a better deal in the ACT as a result.

We know that these talking points come out of the Labor Party machine and they continue to get propagated. One day, the minister will give this one away. I can only hope so. I am half expecting the health minister to jump up next and start talking about the CPRS, because that is another favourite. But let us not get into that one today, because it is a little off-topic. We get that one pretty regularly as well. It is another classic where they say, “You blocked the CPRS.” They always forget to mention that, not very much later, there was a system put in place in partnership with Prime Minister Gillard. I have probably provoked a response at this point.

I listened carefully to Minister Berry. I understand her reticence regarding the nature of the motion today. She basically went on to suggest that we should not be criticising federal members. She did seek to suggest that a criticism of the federal members is unfair and inappropriate. I think that is not the way to approach it. It is fair to be critical of people who have said, “I’m campaigning for this thing. This Liberal government should do it. We think you should do it.” Then, when you come into office and are in a position to do it, you do not do it.

I have received representations that the criticism of Minister Gallagher, in the way the motion was originally written, is unfair, because she does not have the portfolio responsibility to waive this debt; that, as the Minister for Finance, it is not in her remit, and that it is in fact in the Treasurer’s remit. In the spirit of being accurate, and making sure that the motion does reflect the circumstances, I have proposed an amendment that highlights the fact that not only has Senator Gallagher not achieved this, but the Assistant Minister for the Treasury, Andrew Leigh, David Smith and Alicia Payne—all the federal members for the ACT, who are part of the current government—have not been able to achieve this for the ACT.

Minister Berry has noted—and I think that is fair—that there has been considerable funding provided through the HAFF, and I do welcome that investment with open arms and gratitude. I want to acknowledge that, because I think it is fair enough to do so. I note that, with respect to how the Chief Minister tried to frame it, voting against the minister’s second amendment was somehow rejecting a call on the commonwealth government to waive the ACT’s historic housing debt. That is clearly not the case.

Mr Barr: That is what the words were.

MR RATTENBURY: Yes, and it was very clever, Chief Minister, to reframe it in that

way and try to hit a—

Mr Barr: Thank you; I appreciate your endorsement of my cleverness.

MR RATTENBURY: I have never doubted the Chief Minister’s cleverness. That is a different discussion. I will be clear about this: the second half of my amendment calls on the government, first of all, to provide the information. I note that the minister has tabled it today, so I thank her for that. But we then call on the government to write to the commonwealth conveying the request of this Assembly that the commonwealth waive the \$66 million housing debt, noting that the commonwealth has already waived it for South Australia and Tasmania.

In framing it in this way, I go back to the points that Minister Berry made, when she said that she wished we could all work together, and that the community would appreciate that. I very deliberately chose my words here, because I think there is support across the Assembly for the waiving of this debt. I am proposing that the Assembly accept this: when the government write to the minister, they should convey that this whole Assembly is behind this. There is unanimous support in this place, because we all think that it should be waived.

Minister, it is good to work together, and to engage together. I am sure the community will appreciate that you can write on behalf of all of us to convey to the federal government this Assembly’s support. It has been very clear in this debate that this Assembly does want the commonwealth government to waive the ACT’s historic housing debt and that we can do both things. We can be frustrated by and critical of the federal government that they have not done it yet, but we can unite together to call on them to get on with getting it done. I move amendment No. 1 that has been circulated in my name:

In paragraph (4), omit all words after “Senator Gallagher”, substitute: “and her ACT Labor colleagues in the House of Representatives for their sustained failure to secure the waiving of the ACT’s historic housing debt”.

MR BARR (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism and Trade) (4.47): In separating the amendments, I will be clear, obviously, that we would not be supporting the first amendment. I think for obvious reasons; it is pure politics. Obviously, what this place can do if it wants. I do not think it is going to make the task of achieving an outcome any easier. Nevertheless, we are certainly not going to be going down this path. There are other ways.

I would say, in 20 years of experience, insulting people and being nasty to them is generally not the way to get an outcome in politics. Occasionally you can bully people into outcomes—and I have seen that happen over the years—but I would say the success rate of that is generally pretty low. The alternate pathway of trying to win an argument, and putting forward sound and rational outcomes, and rationale behind that tends to have more success, but—

Mr Parton: It worked for us in the last two terms.

MR BARR: Well, I am not sure I could agree with the characterisation of that

interjection, in that most of the time it is the former approach that is used in politics. But occasionally you can, through the quality of your argument, win the day. That is certainly the intent that we have in seeking to pursue this outcome.

Political stunts will come and go. Cheap political shots will come and go. We will all deliver some and be on the receiving end of others over the journey. But we are not going to support this amendment today. We believe the amendment moved by the Deputy Chief Minister would have been the more constructive way forward. We would have been able to support that.

In relation to the second part of Mr Rattenbury's amendments—with a couple of technical corrections which I will come to when we debate that second point—we would have been on board to support that as well. We might well have arrived, in this exercise this afternoon, with the outcome that Mr Rattenbury was seeking. Unfortunately, we will not.

But, look, it is not the first, nor will it be the last time that a little bit of politics has played in this place along the way. It is what it is, Mr Deputy Speaker. We will not be supporting this amendment.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (4.49): I might take this opportunity to speak both to the motion and to the amendment. First, to the motion from Mr Parton and Mr Cocks. I thank them for bringing this to the Assembly today. I note, as has already been discussed, that Mr Parton brought a very similar motion in 2022 and I do want to acknowledge his ongoing advocacy in relation to this issue. I note that a motion was amended by the government at the time to remove the condemnation of Senator Gallagher and require the government to report back to the Assembly in accordance with an earlier motion brought by the ACT Greens. The government's reported response to that motion, tabled at the end of 2023, outlined the advocacy that had been taken. However, the advocacy detailed was unsuccessful, as we all know.

As is regularly discussed in this chamber, housing is a fundamentally important issue in the ACT and, of course, across Australia. And we know social, affordable and community housing have an immeasurably positive impact on people's lives when delivered—and when delivered well. Sixty-six million dollars is a lot of money, and the positive impact that waiving a \$66 million debt would have on the ACT budget—as Ms Barry remarked earlier, and I believe Mr Cocks did as well—is far greater than the negative impact it would have on the commonwealth budget.

We know, as was also discussed in this chamber last week, and as we continue to hear from members of our community, that we have a serious need for more and for improved public housing in the ACT, and to ensure people who are living in existing public housing are adequately serviced. Waiving this debt today will allow us to build, with cash, more than 100 new homes for people who most need them in our community—much more, of course, if using financing.

The benefit that waiving this debt could have is not up for debate today. On that, I believe we are all in agreement. Perhaps there are some small points of difference on the specifics of what is going on.

As the motion notes, Senator Gallagher has advocated for the commonwealth to waive our housing debt in the past. Yet now, as Minister for Finance, she seems to have forgotten that advocacy from prior to the 2022 federal election.

Generally, I am not interested in condemning individuals. I would like to focus more on actions and also holding people to account for actions—and inaction where appropriate. However, when someone has a responsibility as an elected representative to ensure the best outcome for a community and has the power to do so but fails to uphold community expectations, despite the fact that the issue has been raised repeatedly by that person and by other elected representatives both in this Assembly and in the Senate, some responsibility does need to be taken, which is why I am supportive of this motion.

With that said, in fairness, it is not just Senator Gallagher's fault, which is why I support Mr Rattenbury's amendment to condemn her colleagues as well. I do not see this as insulting or being nasty. We do have a role at times—and we had a censure motion in this place—where it is appropriate to condemn actions or inaction that have an impact on our community. And so, I take on board the Chief Minister's remarks, and I agree with him that, generally speaking, being nasty or insulting or attacking is not a good approach to politics and I do not think it is what people expect. But I think with this issue it is genuinely puzzling that we find ourselves where we find ourselves.

I would also like to note that this is not just a Labor issue. As has been remarked, former Liberal Senator Zed Seselja failed to get our housing debt waived, despite the Morrison government waiving Tasmania's debt. And just yesterday, Liberal Senator for New South Wales, Andrew Bragg posted sarcastically online, saying, "Well, this is great news. This is the news you have been waiting for. The Housing Fund is now building a couple of houses in Canberra. They are building them in Canberra." Very sarcastic, this post. "That is right. So, well done. Canberrans, looking after Canberra." Senator Bragg was referring to the 350 new social and affordable homes being built in Belconnen. Clearly, he is not a fan.

It seems to be that, up on the hill, when it comes to improving housing for Canberrans by waiving this historic debt—and in other ways, so all the funding we receive for housing actually goes to housing—unfortunately, we have got a coalition of the unwilling. I wonder how Mr Parton and Mr Cocks feel about the remarks from Senator Bragg, following the failure of Canberra-bashing as an electoral policy leading into the prior federal election. I also wonder how the Liberal Senate candidate feels about the comments from Senator Bragg.

With that said, I do acknowledge Mr Parton for taking a different approach; and Mr Cocks for reflecting on that also in his remarks and continuing to advocate for Canberra, and for this debt to be waived. I also acknowledge similar advocacy from other members in this place, including from the government and from Independent Senator David Pocock, who has also been mentioned.

It is unclear what the blockage actually is, here. Notwithstanding my negative comments regarding letters in this chamber yesterday, I, too, have written to Senator Gallagher seeking an explanation of the Albanese government's current position on this issue and urging her to reconsider that position. I am sure I am in good

company—and it sounds like I am—in having done so.

Once again, I thank Mr Parton and Mr Cocks for bringing today's motion and thank the Greens for preparing two amendments here that add extra nuance and substance to the motion and ensure that we are spreading the condemnation around fairly.

On the earlier vote, I was supportive of the government in the first part of their amendment to insert information about federal funding provided for social and affordable housing, and the targets set through the National Housing Board but, as the votes show, did not support the second part of Minister Berry's amendments.

MS BERRY (Ginninderra—Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Education and Early Childhood, Minister for Homes, Homelessness and New Suburbs and Minister for Sport and Recreation) (4.56): I hear Mr Emerson's comments about not personally attacking people but that, in this situation, it is okay, and Mr Rattenbury's comments in this regard as well. That is the point that I tried to make at the very start of my letter: condemning a single minister and her colleagues would not result in an outcome for Canberra. That is why ACT Labor did not support Mr Parton and Mr Cocks's motion or Mr Rattenbury's amendment, which doubled down on that and included more people in the condemnation.

Mr Cocks: Spread out the pain.

MS BERRY: If we are going to spread out the pain, we should be condemning the former coalition government as well—truly. This has been going for a while. That is my point: it is a waste of time putting that kind of language into a motion which was completely unnecessary, given that, at the end of the day, we have tabled the document that was called for in the motion and we are going to write again to Ms Gallagher and the government about waiving the debt. It is fine; we can do that, and we have been doing that for a while now. We will continue to work with the federal government to make sure that the ACT community gets its fair share of the funding to build more homes in the ACT and continue to grow and meet the needs of the people in our community who need housing and the people on the waitlist.

Also, to put this on the record, my second amendment was to call on the commonwealth government to waive the ACT's historic housing debt, which the Liberals and the Greens parties voted against. We find ourselves in a bit of a wild situation here. Whilst working together, there still seems to be a need to personally attack some individuals through this process, and I find that disappointing.

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (4.58): Let me start by congratulating Minister Berry on her commitment to the Labor machine and Labor spin, but, throughout her comments, she has managed to conflate a whole range of issues. She has managed very well to conflate aspiration with action and delivery, and, indeed, she has conflated condemnation with attacks. This is not actually an attack. Fundamentally, the reason we had to bring this forward today is that this Assembly, on multiple occasions, has voted in favour of engaging with the commonwealth government and writing to ministers. One senator in particular from the Labor side, who is now in government, made an astounding attack on the then assistant finance minister on the basis that, with

a stroke of a pen, he could get things done.

We know that attack was unjustified, but we also know that this Assembly, on multiple occasions, has attempted to engage. The government has outlined the number of times they have attempted to engage. The Chief Minister suggested that the quality of your argument can win the day. Well, if the quality of your argument can win the day, perhaps it is a reflection on the quality of the argument this government has been putting—that, indeed, the debt has not been waived. So we had to ask the question: if the government has failed to achieve a waiver and if federal Labor are unwilling to grant the waiver that the now finance minister and ACT senator was so stridently in support of when in opposition, what other action could this Assembly take? What good would another letter do?

The Assembly is somewhat limited in the power that we have to actually compel any sort of action by the federal government. This was something that we could do. We could say it is not acceptable to advocate for one thing and then turn around and do the opposite. Elected representatives should be held to account for what they say and then what they do. Mr Emerson made that point quite well—that this is holding a federal representative of the ACT and, indeed, all of the Labor representatives for the ACT to account.

We probably should be broadening things. We probably also have to reflect on the so-called Independent senator for the ACT, who has failed on this front too. Indeed, since taking a strident stance on the forgiveness of this debt, in his bid for a then-Liberal held seat, he has utterly failed to achieve even consideration of a debt waiver by federal Labor. This is in stark contrast to other jurisdictions. You just have to look at Tasmania to get a sense of how big that failure is. For Tasmania, Jacqui Lambie managed to negotiate their housing debt to be waived. But not here. With all of the opportunities Senator Pocock has had and with all of the opportunities that every Labor minister has had to advocate for the ACT, nothing has come through. So we had to take this step. This is the step available to us to actually hold them to account. The Canberra community deserves to have a response from the federal government that results in actually waiving the debt.

We considered including the actions within this motion, but we thought it was so important to draw attention to this failure that we did not include them initially. In the very productive discussions that we had with the Greens, which have been in stark contrast to what the minister brought to us, we agreed that it probably is a good idea. Mr Parton will speak to that in due course. It is important that we actually hold our federal representatives to account. We have done that on this side of the chamber and we will continue to do that. It is time for the whole Assembly to do that.

Question put:

That **Mr Rattenbury's** amendment No 1 be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 12

Noes 8

Chiaka Barry	James Milligan	Andrew Barr
Andrew Braddock	Laura Nuttall	Yvette Berry
Peter Cain	Mark Parton	Suzanne Orr
Leanne Castley	Shane Rattenbury	Marisa Paterson
Jo Clay		Michael Pettersson
Ed Cocks		Chris Steel
Thomas Emerson		Caitlin Tough
Jeremy Hanson		Taimus Werner-Gibbings

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Mr Rattenbury's amendment No 1 agreed to.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (5.09), by leave: I move amendment No 2:

Add:

“(5) calls on the Government by the first sitting week in May 2026 to:

- (a) provide information on how much interest has been paid by the ACT Government on the debt since 2001; and
- (b) write to the Commonwealth Finance Minister, Senator Gallagher, conveying the request of the Assembly that the Commonwealth waive the \$66 million housing debt noting that:
 - (i) the Commonwealth has already waived public housing debt in South Australia and Tasmania;
 - (ii) Tasmania and South Australia Governments are able to apply for funding through the Housing Australia Future Fund; and the ACT Government will invest the \$66 million in the provision of new public housing.”.

MR RATTENBURY: Just very briefly, colleagues and Mr Speaker, as I touched on earlier, this adds to Mr Parton's original motion to ensure we actually do convey to the commonwealth, as the whole Assembly, our desire and support for this. Part (5)(a) does ask the minister to provide certain information. As I noted earlier, the minister has provided it, and I thank her for that. It is a fascinating read. It indicates that the principal balance at the turn of the century was \$248 million. We are mercifully now down to \$56 million, so it is lower than perhaps some thought. As the Chief Minister noted, there are some technical errors. In my memory, we are talking about \$66 million.

What is also fascinating is to add up the interest column. I have just sat here and quickly done the calculation. It amounts to \$201 million. It is \$201,997,000; so, effectively, \$202 million has been paid in interest on this debt since the year 2000—\$200 million!

I think this underlines how frustrating it has been to have this debt, and the consequence it has had for the territory. You can see, if you go back to the year 2000, we paid \$11 million in interest that year and managed to pay down \$5 million of the principal. Over time those numbers have switched around, and that is great, but it is an extraordinary number to see.

Imagine how many houses we could have built for that. It is a bit frustrating, but I thank

the minister for sharing the information. It is very useful. I am encouraged that we are now getting much closer, but I still think it is timely and appropriate for the commonwealth to waive the balance of this debt, particularly given they have done it for other jurisdictions.

I commend my second amendment to the Assembly.

MR BARR (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism and Trade) (5.11): Just very briefly, obviously we have already provided that information that Mr Rattenbury has referred to. In relation to part 5(b)(i), just to be absolutely technically correct, South Australia still has a housing debt. They had a partial waiver, not a complete waiver, so—

Mr Parton: Quite a chunk, though. It was quite a chunk.

MR BARR: It was a big chunk, and that was in 2013, and in 2026 they still have a debt—13 years later—so they are still paying it off. So, in 5(b)(i), the use of the word “the”, as in the commonwealth has waived “the” housing debt of South Australia and Tasmania, is not strictly correct. If you deleted the word “the”, it would be correct. I am not sure whether the Assembly can take care of that as a typographical error, but if I can perhaps recommend that, rather than having to move an amendment, then we do not have to go through that process.

And in relation to a further letter, it has been a week of sending letters, so, yes, we are obviously happy to send another letter. But I think there will need to be further advocacy and different approaches to this question, and we will continue to pursue them.

MR PARTON (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (5.13): I have got three quick things in wrapping up for me. One of them is that anybody who characterises the vote on Ms Berry’s second amendment as the Liberals and Greens political party voting against the waiving of the housing debt is just being absurd. Very, very clearly, that amendment was voted against procedurally because it would have changed Mr Rattenbury’s amendment, and indeed it would have been much more sensible for him—

Mr Barr: There we go. A procedural vote will never be used ever by anyone in social media!

MR PARTON: Additionally, Ms Berry has carried on today about condemnation of people, and I just want to say, if an elected Liberal parliamentarian had promised to waive the debt and then got into power and not done it, that Liberal politician would have been fried by you people in this place. It would not have been a roasting or a slow cook; you would have turned the heat up as high as you could on the frying pan and slapped them on the cooking surface and fried them!

Indeed, even Mr Barr in his searching online earlier—he should not have shared it with me—has indicated that there was a motion in this place condemning Zed Seselja in 2013. So it is not really all that new for us to come here and say, “You know what, what that person did should be condemned.”

Finally, I did suggest at the start of this debate—hours ago, Mr Speaker—that nothing had changed since 2022. Well, something has changed, because I can tell you that in 2022 when I moved my motion—and I am going to go with the specific words—I suggested that leaders of all parties represented in the Assembly:

... write to the Finance Minister condemning in the strongest terms her backflip on her pre-election promise and call on the Finance Minister to waive the historic ACT housing debt ...

I can tell you that that was amended by Mr Barr, and the Greens followed suit. The Greens—the Greens political party, sorry! The Greens, in October of 2022, did not want to back us calling for this. And, indeed, what was amended was as weak as—I don't know, like Hawthorn—

Members interjecting—

MR PARTON: What was amended was that they said:

... the leaders of all parties represented in the Assembly to continue to communicate with the Commonwealth Finance Minister, and other relevant Ministers, to advocate and seek clarification from the Federal Government on the potential to waive the historic ACT housing debt ...

So I want to make it clear that, although we are absolutely supporting this amendment that comes from the Greens today, in October of 2022, they were not of a mind to call for the waiving of that debt, because they caved in to their governing partners. Thank you.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (5.16): I appreciate Mr Parton bringing that up, because it demonstrates to Minister Berry that we tried it her way and now we are going to try it another way.

Members interjecting—

Mr Barr: That's very good; I'll pay that! I will nominate you for the Comedy Festival next year, Shane!

MR RATTENBURY: Thank you! On the serious matter, I am very comfortable with what the Chief Minister proposes: to remove the word “the”. If we can do that without needing a formal amendment, I think that would be suitable for the Assembly, and I thank the Chief Minister for making that point.

MR SPEAKER: I have sought advice from the Clerk, and we can do that as long as no-one objects. So we will do that.

Mr Rattenbury's amendment No 2 agreed to.

Question put:

That the motion, as amended, be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 12

Noes 8

Chiaka Barry	James Milligan	Andrew Barr
Andrew Braddock	Laura Nuttall	Yvette Berry
Peter Cain	Mark Parton	Suzanne Orr
Leanne Castley	Shane Rattenbury	Marisa Paterson
Jo Clay		Michael Pettersson
Ed Cocks		Chris Steel
Thomas Emerson		Caitlin Tough
Jeremy Hanson		Taimus Werner-Gibbings

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Papers

Motion to take note of papers

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

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

Independent review into the over-representation of First Nations people in the ACT criminal justice system—government response

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) (5.23): I want to speak to the Attorney-General’s ministerial statement that she tabled and to the commitment she made in the Assembly last September to provide an update after six months on the government’s progress on implementing the recommendations of the Jumbunna report, the independent review into the over-representation of First Nations people in the ACT criminal justice system.

The government’s response in September acknowledged the high priority of recommendations 2.1 and 2.2, which relate to establishing First Nations led governance, identifying priorities and guiding future development of mechanisms connected with First Nations justice issues. The Attorney-General committed that, given the important foundational role that the final report identifies for a governance body, the government would prioritise, in partnership with members of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, the establishment of appropriate governance arrangements.

It is fantastic today to speak to the announcement that the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body has agreed to take on this role to work in partnership with directorates to advise government on how best to sequence and prioritise implementation of the recommendations and to guide future development of reporting mechanisms connected with First Nations justice issues. The Elected Body is uniquely placed to undertake this role. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body

Act 2008 was passed by this Assembly with the intent it would allow for maximum participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the ACT in the formation, coordination and implementation of government policies that affect them. This critical work fits with that intent.

The Elected Body already works in partnership with government, including through participation in government activities. For example, members sit on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs Committee of the ACT Public Service Strategic Board, which is responsible for driving implementation of the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement. Members also co-chair the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs Inter-Directorate Committee, which is responsible for implementation and monitoring of the ACT agreement. The Elected Body also attends the recently formed Select Policy Subcommittee of Cabinet on Closing the Gap.

To support the Elected Body to engage in this work, the government will provide additional funding for two newly established independent justice advisor roles—one with expertise in child, youth and families, and one to focus on adult justice. Funding for the Elected Body independent secretariat will also be increased and Elected Body members will be remunerated for additional time to focus on this work. This arrangement will align with the current Elected Body funding arrangements to June 2027, and the government will work with the Elected Body to consider longer term arrangements as we also consider the response to recommendations from the Listening Report, the ACT government response to the 2025 Elected Body hearings report, phase 3 reporting, and the development of the ACT government transformation plan.

The government also acknowledges Aboriginal community controlled organisations working in the justice space have valuable frontline experience and specialist knowledge that will be critical to identifying priorities and implementing planning. The government is investing \$1.11 million into these arrangements. This approach will deliver on the intent of the recommendations and leverage the well-established mechanisms we have in place to work with the community to agree on how to respond to the recommendations and focus our attention on implementation priorities as soon as possible.

As a priority under these arrangements, directorates and justice agencies will work in collaboration with the Elected Body, the new independent justice advisors, and justice ACCOs to consider the complexity of the current environment, including existing structures, responsibilities, available resources and work underway to develop a proposed implementation plan by December this year. This timing will ensure the outcomes of this work can be considered in the 2027-28 budget process.

I thank the Attorney-General and Minister Orr for all the work they have done to see us at the point of this announcement today.

Bus frequency improvement—Assembly resolution of 5 December 2024—government response

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (5.28): I am principally speaking here to the Minister for Transport's response to my motion of 5 December 2024 on bus frequencies. The response to Ms Clay's motion on 25 February 2026 is also relevant, but I will let her

speak for herself on that directly. This response mostly reads as a bit of a mea culpa. It is increasingly clear to me that the government's planning on bus turntables has been less than adequate. They knew that disruptions on Commonwealth Avenue bridge would be hitting us at some point, and, even despite the fact that the NCA did not alert us on exactly when that would be undertaken, the government have failed to be properly prepared for it, and now their best laid plans have been overtaken by these events.

At the same time, there is some good news. The Woden depot has definitely helped. That is good. Of course, we are going to need two more in the medium term if we are going to meet the future needs of the network: a new north-side depot and potentially another one to replace the Belconnen one due to its inability to be upgraded for electric bus charging infrastructure. One hundred and forty-four new drivers graduated into the Transport Canberra workforce during 2025, which is also very good. That said, this update did not tell us how many retirements from the workforce also occurred during that time, so the net increase is not apparent. We will have to wait for the next *State of the service report* for that. It is also important to recognise that the bus driver workforce will need to keep growing commensurate with the fleet.

The ACT still has a deficit of buses due to underinvestment in past decades. The problem was already acute in 2015, with cabinet receiving advice that capacity needed to more than double to meet the public transport mode-share targets the government has since quietly abandoned. We have kept up with the scale of the problem, but have not caught up to the actual needs to achieve the mode share that we are looking for, so the problem persists. A closed span of the Commonwealth Avenue bridge has simply made the problem more acutely obvious.

If we want people catching public transport, they need to be able to get on board. I am reminded of some of the words of Minister Steel during the early days of MyWay+: "No-one has literally been left behind." This has rung hollow for some, especially on the south side. Thirty more battery electric buses are coming, which is good. There is no procurement plan beyond that, however. That is bad. That hamstringing the government's options in getting a Rapid bus back to Kippax. The Belconnen transitway gets a mention, which is encouraging because it was not mentioned in Minister Cheyne's ministerial statement this morning on the Belconnen region. It would be good if the feasibility study could be presented to the Assembly in the interests of confidence of this project progressing.

If only light rail had been rolled out faster, the demands on our buses would have become a lot easier to manage, but, as the chain keeps getting dragged and the government, according to media reporting, will not be considering a business case until 2028-29, it is unlikely to be considered before caretaker mode kicks in before the 2028 election—let alone the signing of contracts. I want to challenge the government to do better on that front. The budget is only getting more challenges to address, and I am getting increasingly nervous that public transport will be left behind, waiting at a bus stop for a bus that is not coming.

Restore Rapid bus service to Kippax—Assembly resolution of 26 February 2026—government response

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (5.31): I want to speak to the transport minister's tabled

statement about restoring the Rapid bus service to Kippax. Only a month ago, we passed a motion here in the Assembly that noted Labor’s election platform which committed to deliver additional Rapid bus services, including a new Rapid service to support growth in West Belconnen, and committed to increase services on the popular R2 Rapid from Belconnen to the city to better meet demand. That was the commitment Labor took to the election. The Assembly then called on the government to restore a Rapid bus service to Kippax by the commencement of term 3 in 2026 and to take all steps possible, including network scheduling, bus fleet planning, bus leasing and bus acquisitions to restore the full R2 and R3 Rapid bus services to their previous routes and increase other services that might be in need, like the R4 and R5. That is the commitment that was made one month ago by this Assembly.

I am pleased to see that there has been so much work done on network planning. That is really good. It is clear that the directorate has been asked to be and is engaged really deeply in this problem and is working away quite carefully and quite diligently to try to restore the R2 and the R3, to improve and restore the R4 and the R5, and to get that network right, but I am very concerned to see how much a commitment made only one month ago in this Assembly has been watered down in this statement.

What we have here now is that the government intends to deliver improvements within approved operating budgets and existing fleet capacity, and Transport Canberra will keep the Assembly informed of progress in line with the resolution. It further says that anything they do will be achieved through the staged uplift of priority Rapid services. That is fantastic. I am really pleased to hear it. But it says very clearly that it will only be done through improved networking and only if possible and feasible.

What is possible, frankly, is what you set out to do. If we do not get the restoration of those services, I would be really interested to hear what the reason is that it is genuinely impossible to do anything other than change the network. If we get those services back, that is fantastic, but, if we do not, what are you going to tell the people in West Belconnen when, only a month ago, you committed to this Assembly that you would do it?

I am also really concerned about some of the wording in this statement that has been tabled in the Assembly. I will read out that wording now: “It is noted that, while the Assembly has passed a motion supporting action that cannot compel government or a directorate to undertake an action that has not been funded, implementation is explicitly based on maintaining resource neutrality.” I remind you that, between now and term 3, there is a budget, so I imagine it would be possible for the Treasurer, who is also the transport minister, to provide resources if the problem is resources. If the problem is not resources, there are many steps that might be taken.

I am further concerned given the debate we have just had prior to this, when we heard the Chief Minister dismiss a condemnation from the Assembly as mere politics. It sounded frighteningly like the early statements we had from the transport minister, who had just been censured by the Assembly—dismissing that to the media immediately afterwards as mere politics. It took almost a week to get an apology to the community after that initial dismissal for the very real failures and the absolute loss of services on MyWay+.

Please do not continue to take condemnations and censures in the Assembly as mere politics. We are not doing this lightly. These things are because the community asks you to deliver a certain degree of service standard. If you continue to fail to deliver that degree of service standard, what do you expect the public to do? What do you expect us to do and tell the people who have elected us to hold you to account? It is not mere politics. It is not being mean to people. We are simply asking you to follow through on the obligations that this Assembly has asked you to follow through on.

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage and Minister for Transport) (5.35): I was not intending on speaking, but those comments were a personal reflection that I think is incorrect, and the record needs to be corrected. I absolutely did not say that in relation to the censure motion passed by the Assembly. I absolutely took that very seriously in the Assembly, and I think my statement in the Assembly shows that at the time. Also, the government's response to Assembly resolutions is taken very seriously. The government's response to them, as demonstrated by the two responses that have been tabled in the Assembly today, which are being noted, demonstrate that.

In relation to the resolution regarding bus services to Kippax, Transport Canberra is undertaking work to make adjustments to the timetable from term 3. This will involve refining timetables, allocating available time savings, and optimising fleet use to better support connections for West Belconnen and North Belconnen and increased capacity for Rapids in the south. As part of that work, the focus is remaining on using the current fleet and resources as efficiently as possible, based on the actual travel times and the traffic network experienced during term 1 in 2026. We expect that there will be some time savings, which is the difference between what was modelled with the temporary traffic arrangements in place for the NCA's Commonwealth Bridge project and what the actual travel times are. That can be returned to the network in improved services, and that is what we will do. That work on network design is underway.

We did take the call from the Assembly very seriously to examine what the opportunities are around bus acquisition and leasing. However, we have concluded that additional buses cannot be delivered for operations beginning from term 3 in 2026. We took that on board. We looked at the options and, based on the information that was provided by Transport Canberra's contracted bus supplier, VDI Australia, Transport Canberra confirmed that buses could not be delivered to Transport Canberra earlier than six months from contract signing, with the flow of vehicles then being a minimum of one per week. They simply would not be available to use for any uplift from term 3. That is why the government is focusing on using the savings in the network to deliver on the things that the Assembly asked us to focus on, which was looking at the R2, the R4, the R3 and the R5. That is what the government's response looks at and details, and I think that is the right and sensible approach.

In relation to the other motion, about which the government has also provided a response that was tabled in the Assembly today, the government remains committed to the upgrades to the transport services that we took to the election in ACT Labor's transport plan. That includes additional Rapid routes that we will deliver this term, in accordance with the supply and confidence agreement. It includes improvements to frequency, including to local routes, but also adds capacity to the existing routes like the R2. We have made some of those improvements already this term, but it was

because of the National Capital Authority's work on the Commonwealth Avenue Bridge that we have had this temporary period of disruption, which will last until the end of next year. Once that is over, we can continue that high level of extra frequency that we added to the network, plus deliver on the rest of the commitments that we have made to additional Rapid services to meet the needs of Tuggeranong, Ginninderry and other parts of Belconnen, and a new Rapid that would service the Molonglo region as well.

We are committed to doing those things, but we are in a period of disruption. I encourage Ms Clay to look at that other government response. The two should be read together, because they both speak to each other in terms of the broader picture about the delivery of transport services over the coming months and the coming years of this term.

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (5.40), by leave: I thought that I had remembered correctly the media statements that the transport minister made after the original tabling of the MyWay+ statement, in which he did not accept responsibility. If I have misremembered that period of time, I happily withdraw my comments. We certainly did get an excellent response from government in the months following that tabling, and I am very pleased to hear that it sounds like government is working quite hard to restore those Rapid buses to West Belconnen. It is really important to West Belconnen that we get those buses back. A lot of people have suffered from this, and they need that service to be restored.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Alcohol and other drug facility—feasibility report Paper and statement by minister

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (5.42): I present the following paper:

Feasibility report—Alcohol and Other Drug Facility—ACT Health Directorate,
dated 28 March 2025.

I seek leave to make a short statement.

Leave granted.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: The report that I have just tabled is dated 28 March 2025. This means it was not captured in the freedom of information request that was submitted on 13 February, and re-scoped on 19 February, by one of the Burrangiri activists. It was captured in the 213A request that was supported in this place on 10 April last year. However, I noted during the debate on that motion that it seemed like a poor mechanism to seek the relevant documents because the only options to respond to a 213A were to either release the full, unredacted document or withhold it completely if it contained confidential material.

Predictably, the Chief Minister did subsequently claim privilege in relation to this document because it contained material that would prejudice a deliberative process of

government and disclose the deliberations of cabinet in relation to future budget decisions. That was as of 23 April 2025. These considerations are no longer relevant, but I note that the document has not subsequently been requested, certainly to my knowledge, through any other mechanism that would allow it to be appropriately redacted.

The version that I have tabled this afternoon does include some redactions. It contains commercial information, including information that would potentially compromise GHD's intellectual property and/or prejudice any future approach to market for future works, and those elements have been redacted. Some redactions have also been made that relate to the operation of the alcohol and other drug facility, which is not relevant to the debate on Burrangiri, and could also have security implications, as well as the names of people who were involved in the development of the report. The report provides useful information on the potential costs of major works that implement the findings of the asset management plan and would bring the building up to building code.

In sharing the report, I note that the estimated timelines and costings are likely to be complicated by the age of the building and its future use, the presence of asbestos, which could not be appropriately determined, any in-slab plumbing, load bearing walls, and development application processes. This is very indicative. I hope that providing this information ahead of the debate tomorrow will help to inform the debate tomorrow afternoon.

Papers

Mr Pettersson, pursuant to standing order 213A, presented the following papers:

CIT CEO recruitment—Documents—Order to table—Copy of—

Transmittal letter to the Clerk from the ACT Head of Service, dated 25 March 2026.

Privilege claimed on certain returned documents—Letter to the Clerk from the Chief Minister, dated 25 March 2026.

Index of returned documents.

Returned documents (1 folder).

Statements by members

Chief Minister's Canberra Gold Awards

MR BARR (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism and Trade) (5.45): Earlier this month, I had the pleasure of presenting 106 individuals and 31 organisations with a Gold Award. The Chief Minister's Canberra Gold Awards recognise people and organisations who have helped to make Canberra a great place to live, work and enjoy, for more than 50 years.

Amongst those was Constable Kenny Koala, who began his history in Canberra with a guest appearance on the then CTC 7 show *Junior Police 7* in September 1975. With his role in ACT Policing, he has gone on to deliver safety messages to more than 20,000 children in Canberra schools each year.

Constable Kenny is an iconic part of our city's history and is much loved by multiple generations of Canberrans. He effectively shares important messages on road safety, protective behaviours, online safety, decision-making and consequences, and helps children in the community to remain safe.

I also want to acknowledge the 31 groups who received a Gold Award. They included eight public schools, a diverse range of sports and social clubs, the voluntary guides at the Australian War Memorial, and the Canberra Potters Society. Since 2005, almost 5,000 individuals and more than 200 groups have received a Gold Award.

Wildlife—flying foxes

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (5.46): I want to raise the matter today of bats. No, not ceiling batts; the grey-headed flying foxes—specifically, the colony in Commonwealth Park. My question is: how best do we protect this endangered species, given the proposed plans for Commonwealth Park? In my experience thus far in engaging with the National Capital Authority and with the environment minister, I do not have any sense of comfort that the responsibility for their ongoing safety and preservation is being considered holistically or that the bats are truly on the ACT government's or the National Capital Authority's radar.

I wrote to the National Capital Authority last year, after ACT Wildlife reached out to me, concerned about how the colony was going to be managed, given the proposed work in Commonwealth Park, including the aquatic centre. While some of my questions were addressed, the bulk were not. I got the distinct sense of being batted away between the minister and the NCA, each pointing to the other as being the responsible party.

One of the requests from ACT Wildlife is pretty simple: to be consulted during the design phase of the aquatic centre to ensure that the pools are built so that the bats cannot dip, which they do as they leave their roosts—it is how they drink—creating a potential health risk and raising community fears and negative attitudes towards the bats.

This is a matter of environmental protection, community health and safety and infrastructure development, and the ACT government needs to give it appropriate attention.

ACT Youth Parliament

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (5.48): I want to speak briefly about the Y ACT Youth Parliament launch last Friday evening, attended by many members of this chamber and some federal parliamentarians. It was a special opportunity to gather an array of young voices and provide them with the opportunity to practice debating skills, become acquainted with community issues and share their perspectives. Twenty-five young people under the age of 25 will participate in the multi-month program, which will include mock parliamentary sittings and mock committee meetings.

Mr Speaker, in chairing that part of the meeting, you were the honorary host, to say the least. I thank you for your role in encouraging young people to learn more about the parliamentary system in our city and in our country, and to participate. It was also good

to be joined by the Canberra Liberals leader, my colleague Mr Cocks and many other MLAs from this chamber.

I would like to give a special shout-out to the Y, one of Canberra's leading youth groups, for their tireless advocacy and for having the initiative to organise the program. I would like to acknowledge that one of my junior advisers, Mr Tim Robson, was also in attendance; he has a strong interest in local politics. Additionally, and in closing, I would like to thank the organisers, especially leaders like Kirsty Dixon, for their efforts to make this program a success.

Professor Kathleen Tymms—retirement

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (5.50): I rise today to celebrate the contribution made by Associate Professor Kathleen Tymms, who is retiring after 50 years of exceptional service. Professor Tymms has worked at Canberra Hospital since 1977, beginning her career as an intern. In 1984, she became the first female rheumatologist in the ACT, and for many years she served as medical director for rheumatology services.

Appointed as a clinical associate professor by the ANU in 2006, she has supervised higher degree rheumatology students and ANU fellows, contributed to musculoskeletal curriculum development, and taught and examined every cohort of medical students since the establishment of the ANU Medical School in 2003. She has remained an active researcher and collaborator, with 83 peer-reviewed publications. In private practice, she established one of Australia's first rheumatology biologics databases. She is a founding member of the Australian Scleroderma Interest Group and was involved in establishing the intervention for medication adherence outcomes measures.

In 2024, she received an Order of Australia, in recognition of her long and distinguished service to medicine. Professor Tymms's patients have expressed enormous trust in her. Indeed, I have heard this directly from them. Colleagues also regularly seek her advice, a testament to the respect she has earned.

I thank Professor Tymms for her leadership, dedication to clinical excellence, and commitment to teaching and mentoring new generations of clinicians. Professor Tymms has strengthened care across the ACT region, and I wish her all the best for the future.

St John Ambulance—StreetBeat

MS TOUGH (Brindabella) (5.51): On Saturday, I had the opportunity to attend the St John Ambulance CPR and AED awareness campaign at South.Point, as part of the StreetBeat initiative. St John Ambulance plays a vital role in our community, and events like this campaign are a powerful reminder that lifesaving does not always start in a hospital; it often starts with someone nearby who knows what to do. Throughout the day, participants learned what AEDs are and when they should be used, and how straightforward they are to operate, how to perform effective CPR, and why early CPR combined with an AED can dramatically increase survival rates for someone

experiencing cardiac arrest.

A key part of StreetBeat is ensuring AEDs are accessible where people live, shop, work and gather. Publicly available AEDs have been installed across a wide range of locations throughout Canberra, including shopping centres, schools, sporting fields, lakeside areas and town centres. For anyone interested in learning more, getting trained or finding an AED near you, further information is available on the St John Ambulance website and StreetBeat website, because knowledge, confidence and quick action truly save lives and anyone can be a lifesaver.

I want to thank Jordan and Marty for their time on Saturday, particularly Jordan, for giving me a hands-on lesson in using an AED and performing CPR at South.Point.

Discussion concluded.

Adjournment

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

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

Volunteering Expo

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (5.53): I rise to acknowledge the wonderful 2026 Volunteering Expo that I attended last week at the University of Canberra and to recognise the incredible contribution that our volunteers make to our city. Around 30 per cent of ACT residents volunteer in some capacity in our city, consistently above the national average. The ACT has one of the most highly skilled volunteer workforces in Australia, with many bringing experience from the public service, defence, health and education sectors.

Volunteers contribute hundreds of thousands of hours each year across Canberra's community organisations. In a city like Canberra, known for its institutions and public service, it is easy to overlook the quiet work happening every day behind the scenes. Volunteers are the backbone of our community. Emergency Services, ACT SES and the Rural Fire Service rely heavily on volunteers during storms, bushfires and extreme weather events.

With respect to community support, organisations like food relief providers, homelessness services and disability support groups depend on volunteers every day. With respect to sport, thousands of Canberrans, and particularly our children, play weekend sports because of volunteer coaches, referees and committee members. With respect to arts and events, festivals, local theatres and cultural institutions across our city rely on volunteers to operate. Of course, our Landcare and environment groups do so much to care for and enhance our local regions within our bush capital and provide a massive saving for government services.

Volunteering plays a key role in supporting seniors to stay connected and independent. They strengthen mental health and social cohesion. They build resilient communities during emergencies. They create opportunities for fellowship, networking and

enhancement of a person's day through giving via their volunteering activity.

Behind every strong Canberra community is a group of volunteers quietly making it work: the SES volunteer who turns out in the middle of the night, the coach on the sideline on a freezing Saturday morning at Kippax or Charnwood, and the local community group that makes sure no-one goes without a meal or a conversation.

With respect to everyone who took part in the expo—and there were so many not-for-profit and community organisations represented—it was a wonderful display of Canberra's generosity, and I want to thank them.

In closing, a special thankyou goes to Volunteering ACT, who coordinated this event, and does so every year. It is a voice for our volunteering organisations and community in the ACT. In particular, I want to thank the board—Sajid Hassan, the chair, Helen McKenna, the deputy chair, and directors Rachel Thomas, Cherie Hughes and Annette Watson. Of course, it is the team on the ground that makes it happen, under the leadership of Jean Giese, the CEO, Mel Cantwell, the Chief Operating Officer and Company Secretary, Heather Fitt, the Senior Manager, Policy and Advocacy, Sam Steel, Corporate Governance and Executive Support Manager, Shane Vincent, Volunteer and Inclusion Manager, Melaina Tate, Programs and Community Development Manager, Shannon Kukolic, Membership and Sector Development Manager, Katie Kennedy, Community Support Manager, Paula Boldra, Senior Operations and Finance Coordinator, Jenni Rickard, Senior Policy and Advocacy Coordinator, Emma Hawke, Senior Policy and Advocacy Coordinator, Chris Corcoran, Senior Community Development Coordinator, Jessica Wright, Senior Program Coordinator, Inclusion, Vani Mittal, Senior Marketing, Communications and Events Coordinator, Hayley Garcia, Programs Coordinator, Inclusion, and Dee Lang, Events Coordinator.

I look forward to continuing to liaise with Volunteering ACT and our community and not-for-profit sector, particularly in my roles as shadow minister for community services and disability, shadow minister for seniors and veterans, and shadow minister for government services. All of these portfolios—in fact, every government portfolio—benefit from talking to and encouraging our volunteers.

US-Iran war—carbon emissions

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (5.58): Most of us would be familiar with the concept of the butterfly effect—the idea proposed by meteorologist Edward Lorenz that tiny actions far away can lead to larger consequences closer to home. All of us are currently watching the big, ugly butterfly in Washington DC, flapping his erratic wings over this illegal war with Israel against Iran. The larger consequences of this closer to home are beginning to come into clearer focus—skyrocketing fuel prices, fertiliser shortages and other consequences.

One of the most significant consequences in the medium to long term is the war's massive contribution to carbon emissions. The *Guardian* had a good article about this last Saturday, which I will quote from, but I want to start with the irony at the heart of all of this. Despite the US leadership's specious claims of concern for the oppression of the Iranian people, this war is being fought because of oil and gas. Thanks to

humanity's addiction to the greenhouse gas emitting fossil fuels that are dangerously heating our planet, countries are fighting with each other and emitting even more greenhouse gases in the process.

In early January, in the context of Trump's previous oil-related military adventure in Venezuela, US author Bill McKibben wrote that every solar panel that goes up "incrementally reduces the attractiveness of the oil that underlies so much conflict and tyranny".

I am proud of the ACT's contribution to peace in this regard, and I urge the government to continue to raise its ambition to achieve full decarbonisation as soon as possible. Sadly, our emissions are dwarfed by those of the US military, and the situation has only grown more serious since Bill McKibben's words just 11 weeks ago.

Here are a few figures. During the US war in Afghanistan, their scope 1 and scope 2 emissions peaked at 84 million tonnes per year. Currently, on average, the US military emits more than the entire country of Portugal. In 2019, a year when the United States was not even at war, US Air Force scope 1 and 2 emissions came in at 25 million metric tonnes of CO₂ equivalent, while their navy was up there, at 17.6 million metric tonnes. An analysis by the Climate and Community Institute, a US-based progressive climate and economy think tank, estimates that the new war in the Middle East has led to around five million tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions in just the first two weeks. This is in addition to the massive environmental damage being caused by attacks on military and civilian targets, ships and fossil fuel infrastructure.

Of course, we have all seen the pictures of Tehran lying beneath choking black smoke following the bombing of fuel storage depots. The *Guardian* piece extensively quotes Patrick Bigger, a co-author of the Climate and Community Institute's analysis, and I cannot put it any better than he does. He said:

Every missile strike is another downpayment on a hotter, more unstable planet, and none of it makes anyone safer. Every refinery fire and tanker strike is a reminder that fossil-fuelled geopolitics is incompatible with a livable planet. This war shows, yet again, that the fastest way to supercharge the climate crisis is to let fossil fuel interests dictate foreign policy.

It is estimated that, at current rates of emissions, the world's greenhouse gas budget—that is, the amount of carbon dioxide that we can afford to emit and still leave ourselves with a 50 per cent chance of limiting warming to 1.5 degrees—will be exhausted within two years. This war will further shrink that timeframe. I will quote Patrick Bigger again:

Historically, every US-driven energy shock has been followed by a surge in new drilling, new LNG terminals and new fossil-fuel infrastructure. This war risks hard-wiring another generation of carbon dependence.

He went on to say:

This is not a war for security. It's a war for the political economy of fossil fuels—and the people paying the price are Iranian civilians and working-class communities around the world.

Here in the ACT, the Greens want to see us continue to take real action on climate. It is clear that the solutions to the climate crisis will go some way to solving some of the other crises facing us today—our federal government’s shameful support for an abhorrent and illegal war, and the cost-of-living pressures threatening households just trying to get by.

Yesterday, we called on this Assembly to advocate for a simple tax on gas exports to stop fossil fuel profits getting exported offshore and away from where that revenue is needed the most. We were disappointed to see it voted down. We will continue advocating for solutions for our city, our country and the planet. Every day that this war continues, and every day that our dependence on fossil fuels continues, is a day that makes the climate crisis worse.

Kulture Break—24hr Movement Challenge

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS (Brindabella) (6.03): I rise to laud the extraordinary contribution to Canberra of Tuggeranong hero Francis Owusu, the founder and CEO of Kulture Break, and to celebrate the powerful impact of the recent 24hr Movement Challenge, an initiative that continues to strengthen the wellbeing of young people across Canberra.

For more than two decades, Kulture Break, which was originally based out of Erindale and is still supported by the ACT government, has been devoted to the wellbeing, transformation and empowerment of young people, using movement and creativity as tools for resilience and confidence.

Since its inception in 2002, Kulture Break has reached more than 100,000 local youngsters, including my youngest son and daughter, through school-based early intervention programs designed to support physical, social and mental health, as well as reaching out to over half-a-million young people nationally and internationally. Francis created the 24hr Movement Challenge in 2022 to honour the legacy of a young man connected to Kulture Break who was heartbreakingly lost, and to prevent similar tragedies.

The 24-hour mental health challenge is grounded in sobering facts. Fifty per cent of mental health problems emerge by age 14, 75 per cent by age 24, and one in four Australian students experience bullying, whether in person or online. These statistics underscore why early intervention and programs like Kulture Break’s resilience through movement are so critical.

The 2026 24hr Movement Challenge embodied the best of Canberra: compassion, determination, inclusion, and collective purpose. It demonstrated how one person’s vision, supported by an entire community, can create profound and lasting change for young people who need it most.

This year’s challenge took place at CrossFit 2600 in Fyshwick, from 6 am on Friday, 20 March to 6 am on Saturday, 21 March. This year’s challenge brought many, quite frankly, mad but motivated and very good people together—walking, dancing, lifting, heaving and supporting one another in guided sessions designed not merely for fitness but for solidarity and hope.

I have known Francis for quite a long time. We were co-boundary umpires for our sons' Tuggeranong Valley Aussie Rules under 13s and under 14s teams. Those sons are now at Erindale College together. Maybe a distant memory of me once being able to run encouraged Francis to ask me to join his Kulture Break team and bring some fire. I staggered into CrossFit 2600 at 11.20 pm last Friday night and brought some cinders. It was the best I could muster. I had had a big seven days. Mr Speaker, I hope your daughter, who I understand may have been there contemporaneously, was able to bring a little more sizzle than I could.

My timing was good, however, because, between 11.20 pm and when I staggered away at 3 am on Saturday morning, the movements were entirely achievable—some tyre heaving, some dancing with Francis, some team tunnel balls and team basketball shooting, and a “keep the faith” walk. I did not, by choice and delirium, do the last machine activity of the challenge. I do not know what the machine was, but no-one who had done one was looking forward to it.

Francis, to his eternal credit, took it to the max. At 12.05 am, 18 hours into the challenge, he taught 50-odd of us a disco dance. At 2.30 am, he was running the “keep the faith” walk. When I hugged him goodbye at 3 am, he was yawning a lot but still upright. Hero!

I commend Francis Owusu, the Kulture Break team, the CrossFit 2600 team, every volunteer, every participant, every donor, and everyone who supported the challenge in body and attitude and/or with money and generosity. This year's donation target was \$140,000. The target was surpassed. The 2026 24hr Movement Challenge raised \$156,962. These efforts are not just raising funds. They are saving lives, building confidence and ensuring that no young person in our community feels alone.

The funds raised will help to empower vulnerable young people, connect them with supportive mentors, and build the skills they need to endure and recover from life's challenges. That is the very definition of remarkable local leadership and impact, and hats off.

Pregnancy and child loss—Say Their Name Day

MS TOUGH (Brindabella) (6.08): I rise today to acknowledge Say Their Name Day, observed annually on 25 March. This day provides an important opportunity for the community to recognise the babies and children who have died during pregnancy, infancy and childhood and to honour the profound and enduring impact of those losses on families, friends and communities across Australia. Say Their Name Day is led by Red Nose to raise awareness of pregnancy loss, infant loss and child loss and to raise much needed funds to ensure that bereaved families have access to appropriate support services when they need them most.

The death of a baby or child is one of the most devastating experiences a family can endure. Parents often describe the loss as life-altering—a moment in which their sense of safety, certainty and future is irrevocably changed. The grief that follows is deep, complex and lifelong. It is not something that can be resolved or explained away; it is something that must be carried. Yet too often this grief is met with silence. Many

bereaved parents have spoken of the isolation they experience after their loss, of not knowing where to turn and of the discomfort others feel in acknowledging their child's death. In that silence, names go unspoken and stories remain unheard.

Say Their Name Day exists in response to the wishes of bereaved parents themselves. They have told us how important it is to speak their child's name and to hear that name spoken by others. Saying a name acknowledges that a life existed, that the child mattered and that they continue to matter. By saying a baby or a child's name, we recognise their place within their family and within our community. We validate the grief of those who loved them and we help to ensure that their loss is not minimised or forgotten. Say Their Name Day is not only about remembrance; it is about support—practical, compassionate and ongoing.

Through Red Nose, parents and families can access free and confidential support services, including a 24-hour support line and live chat delivered by trained professionals who understand the complexities of grief following the death of a baby or child. Those services provide vital support, not only in the immediate aftermath of loss but also in the months and years that follow as families navigate anniversaries, milestones and the long-term process of learning to live with a changed reality.

There are many ways individuals and organisations can participate: by saying a name, by sharing a message of remembrance, by hosting or supporting a fundraising activity or by making a donation in memory of a loved child. Each action contributes to a broader culture of understanding and care. Ultimately, Say Their Name Day affirms a simple but essential truth: every little life matters. It reminds us that bereaved families deserve recognition, compassion and access to appropriate support, not just for a moment but for as long as they need it.

On this day, we honour the babies and children who have died, we acknowledge the grief carried by their families, and we recommit ourselves as a community and as an Assembly to ensure that no family walks this path alone.

Fuel security—agriculture and food

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (6.11): With Strait of Hormuz currently closed to shipping, choking off the world's supply of oil and fertiliser, and as we contend with the abject horrors of a war levelled against the Iranian people and people across the Middle East, it is unfortunately also crucial for the ACT and for Australia as a whole to look ahead to our potential future food security, not in the years or months to come but, potentially, within weeks.

As at 5 March, the federal Minister for Climate Change and Energy, Chris Bowen, reported that Australia had a 34-day supply of diesel fuel, including vessels safely in transit. This sort of sounds okay, but in a lot of ways it is really not. According to a number of experts, we are the only member country in the International Energy Agency that fails to meet agreed fuel reserve levels of 90 days supply. Our Pacific neighbours, Japan and South Korea, have six months worth or more.

Australian defence analyst and former Deputy Chief of the RAAF, John Blackburn, wrote a hair-on-fire report nearly 12 years ago on the vulnerability of Australia's supply

chains due to our reliance on imported fossil fuels, and he has recently said that the situation has only become worse in the years since. For example, we have gone from having seven refineries to just two. Over 90 per cent of our fossil fuel for transport now comes by ship from overseas. We have already seen panic-buying at the bowsers, along with official entreaties that we should not do it. We have heard farmers begging to have their diesel and fertiliser supplies secured to enable harvesting or planting. A third of the world's fertiliser passes through the Strait of Hormuz.

What I have not seen nearly enough reporting on is the availability of food that we buy. Whether it is from big supermarket chains, corner stores or local markets, it is completely dependent on the diesel fuel that runs the trucks that bring produce from farms to processing to the warehouses and to the retail stores. What happens if this 34-day supply of diesel dwindles? What if it runs out? Unfortunately, it is pretty arcane stuff. How many days food supply does an average household keep in stock? How many days supply do supermarkets and fast food outlets have on hand? Are private companies thinking ahead to what they will do if their delivery trucks stop running? Is there a plan to triage the most urgent needs if the worst happens?

It is grim to think about, but at some point we might have to confront the questions that are more important: the diesel for Canberra Hospital's back-up generator or refrigerated food trucks bringing Canberra's milk from Penrith or tomatoes from Bundaberg? Will the government allow a desperate public to just source scarce items in supermarket aisles or will they step into institute rationing? What is the trigger point for enacting any plans—when food suppliers actually start to run out or when there is a chance that they will not because more fuel has arrived in the port? What is the calculation regarding the need to warn people that shortages are likely versus the risk of generating a panic? Are there enough electric vehicles in Australia with enough cargo capacity to requisition them for food delivery if we need to? How would this work?

John Blackburn and other experts are warning that we may well need to have answers to many of these questions sooner rather than later. That means it is too late to triple or quadruple our fuel storage capacity, even if this were desirable—and, if we are serious about addressing the climate crisis, it is definitely not desirable. We need to wean ourselves off fossil fuels, not facilitate their future use. Let's learn the right lessons from what is happening as a result of this war. Let's take the right action on an urgent timetable. This means electrifying our commercial transport fleet as quickly as possible, it means reducing our food miles by incentivising more sensible supply chains, and it means encouraging local food production as well as composting in backyards, community gardens and on small farms.

There is a lot that we can do in this area, and the current crisis in some ways shows the prescience of the Greens' 2024 platform on food security. We proposed establishing a food hub for local farmers so their produce could be processed and distributed here in the ACT, protecting prime agricultural land with long-term leases, providing interest-free loans for local farmers, creating new and larger community gardens across Canberra, and funding five full-time equivalent primary school garden coordinators to support school kitchen gardens.

These things are still needed, the window has not closed, and the fuel crisis has just made it more evident. We should be starting this work now. We should support our

local agriculture and support more people to grow their own food, whether it is in their back yard or in a community garden. Let's not leave it until we have people going hungry because the crop yields are plummeting or supermarket trucks are not coming.

Relationships Australia—Neighbours Every Day

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (6.16): I rise today to speak about Neighbours Every Day, a national year-round campaign led by Relationships Australia. The theme of Neighbours Every Day is Belonging Every Day, which is a call to action for individuals, community groups, business and governments to take everyday actions that create social connection and foster respectful relationships. It is a simple yet profoundly important message. Each year, the campaign culminates in a dedicated day of action called Neighbour Day, celebrated on the last Sunday in March. This year, Neighbour Day falls on 29 March 2026, this coming Sunday. Neighbour Day provides an opportunity for people across our city to celebrate by hosting or supporting events that engage communities and build new or stronger connections.

The initiative includes an annual Tell Us Your Story competition, which invites people to share neighbourly stories to inspire others to create, share and grow belonging. The 2026 ACT winner, Saad, described arriving in Australia from Pakistan feeling uncertain and out of place and how joining a community radio station helped him build confidence and belonging. Through sharing migrant stories and connecting people across cultures, he learned that belonging comes from connection and being heard. That experience shaped his leadership in multicultural media and community services, where he now helps others to feel included.

Neighbours Every Day aims to respond to evidence that nearly one in three Australians experience loneliness. Research conducted for Relationships Australia by the Australian National University and the University of Queensland shows that participants in Neighbours Every Day experience significantly lower levels of loneliness than the general population.

In the 2024 Living Well in the ACT Region survey, 12.4 per cent of Canberrans reported they often or always feel lonely. Loneliness was significantly higher among those aged 30 to 39, with 18.8 per cent reporting frequent loneliness, compared to 10.8 per cent of those aged 18 to 29 and 13.5 per cent of those aged 15 to 64. Other studies have found an increase in prevalence of loneliness among young people.

We know that social isolation and loneliness have detrimental impacts on health and other social outcomes. They have been linked to a wide range of physical and mental health conditions, including depression, alcohol misuse, suicidality, high blood pressure and reduced immunity. The Assembly's Standing Committee on Education and Community Inclusion released the report of its inquiry into loneliness and social isolation in 2024. Ahead of the 2024 election, ACT Labor committed to investigate options to tackle loneliness by supporting activities that build human connection and co-designing a social prescribing program with GPs and youth health services. Work is underway to progress this commitment. This is a step towards a more connected and supportive Canberra, one where people in our community never feel isolated or alone. While government could help create and support conditions for connection and

belonging, community organisations like Relationships Australia are integral to making that belonging real.

In closing, I want to acknowledge two organisations in my electorate that are creating new connections every weekend. They are the co-located Holy Cross Anglican Church and St Margaret's Uniting Church in Hackett. Many members will be aware of the long-running Holy Cross Tuckerbox food pantry that operates every Saturday with an accompanying white elephant stall. Orange Sky is also on site offering washing services and conversation every Saturday from 1 pm to 3 pm. And now these fantastic services have been joined by Maggie's Cafe. People often arrive early for the Tuckerbox, sometimes hours before registration formally opens at 12.30. They use this time to catch up with volunteers and other customers. The St Margaret's Uniting congregation saw an opportunity to open a cafe that is open to everyone to drop in for afternoon tea and enjoy delicious homemade cakes and savouries and have a comfortable place to chat. It was a great pleasure to spend some time at St Margaret's and Holy Cross on Saturday, 14 March and to chat with a number of the volunteers and customers of these fantastic services.

As Neighbour Day approaches, I encourage Canberrans to reach out to a neighbour, attend a local event or simply start a conversation with a stranger. You never know, you might make someone's day.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

The Assembly adjourned at 6.20 pm.