



DEBATES
OF THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

DAILY HANSARD

Edited proof transcript

26 May 2026

This is an **EDITED PROOF TRANSCRIPT** of proceedings that is subject to further checking. Members' suggested corrections for the official *Weekly Hansard* should be lodged in writing with the Hansard office no later than **Tuesday, 16 June 2026**.

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Tuesday, 26 May 2026

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

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

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

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

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

Resignation of member Statement by Speaker

MR SPEAKER: Pursuant to Continuing Resolution 2 dated 27 March 1992, as amended 6 March 2008, which authorises me to receive written notice of resignation of a member, I wish to inform the Assembly that I received a written notice from Mr Rattenbury, dated 15 May 2026.

Pursuant to subsection 13(3) of the Australian Capital Territory (Self-Government) Act 1988, I present the following papers:

Australian Capital Territory (Self-Government) Act 1988 (Cwlth), pursuant to subsection 13(3)—Resignation of office as Member—Mr Shane Rattenbury—Copy of letter of resignation, dated 15 May 2026.

Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory—Casual Vacancy—Copy of letter to the ACT Electoral Commissioner, from the Speaker, dated 15 May 2026.

Petitions

The following petitions were lodged for presentation:

Gungahlin United Football Club—petitions 32-26 and 48-26

By Mr Cain, from 566 and 2 residents, respectively:

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

The following residents of the ACT draw the attention of the Assembly to the collapse of Gungahlin United Football Club and the serious unanswered questions that remain.

The club's financial collapse did not occur overnight. There are concerns that earlier intervention or stronger oversight by relevant governing bodies may have identified risks and prevented escalation. Players, families and volunteers have experienced significant financial and personal impacts as a result. The community is entitled to clear answers and accountability. Gungahlin United was a major community sporting organisation, with more than 2,000 players by June 2025, including:

- 170 teams across all ages and competitions
- Over 100 matches played each Saturday at Harrison
- A partnership with Western Sydney Wanderers FC
- The leaders in high performance and youth player development
- Projected growth to around 2,400 players by 2030.

The collapse of a club of this scale raises legitimate questions about governance, oversight and the sustainability of community sport in the ACT.

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

1. Conduct a full, independent inquiry into:
 - (a) the governance, financial management and decision-making processes within Gungahlin United Football Club;
 - (b) whether appropriate oversight, monitoring and intervention occurred by Capital Football and relevant governing bodies;
 - (c) whether any warning signs were identified, and if so, how they were managed;
 - (d) whether infrastructure constraints, including the delayed delivery of the Throsby Home of Football, impacted the club's operations and financial position.
2. Undertake a governance review of Capital Football, including:
 - (a) its oversight of affiliated clubs;
 - (b) its financial monitoring and intervention processes;
 - (c) the adequacy of current safeguards to ensure the sustainability of community football clubs.
3. Refer any evidence of serious misconduct identified through the inquiry to the appropriate authorities.

Pursuant to standing order 99A, the petitions, having at least 500 signatories, were referred to the 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 minister for response pursuant to standing order 100, the petitions were received.

Ministerial responses

The following responses to petitions have been lodged:

Parkinson's disease—community nursing services—petitions 71-25 and 19-26

By **Ms Stephen-Smith**, Minister for Health, dated 13 May 2026 in response to a petition lodged by Mr Emerson on 25 February 2026 concerning community-based Parkinson's disease nurses.

The response read as follows:

Dear Mr Duncan

Government Response to Petition 019-26 and E-Petition 071-25: Community-based Parkinson's Disease nurse for residents in the ACT

Thank you for your letter dated 25 February 2026, concerning petitions E-PET-071-25 and PET-019-26 lodged by Mr Thomas Emerson MLA, regarding the need for a Community-based Parkinson's Disease nurse for residents in the ACT.

In 2024, the Government committed to establishing this position, to enable the expansion of services for people with Parkinson's Disease. I recognise the concerns raised by the community regarding the need for this position to be established by Canberra Health Services (CHS).

I can advise that a process to recruit to this position has commenced by CHS, with the successful candidate to commence as soon as possible.

I look forward to seeing the expansion of services for Canberrans living with Parkinson's Disease and thank the Assembly for its interest and support of the Parkinson's community.

Macquarie swimming pool—site lease—petitions 4-26 and 20-26

By **Mr Steel**, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, dated 20 May 2026 in response to a petition lodged by Ms Clay on 25 February 2026 concerning Big Splash.

The response read as follows:

Dear Mr Duncan

Government response – E-PET-004-26 and PET-020-26 – Save Big Splash

Thank you for your correspondence of 26 February 2026 regarding e-petition 004-26 and petition 020-26, concerning the water park facility at Block 1 Section 53 Macquarie known as Big Splash Water Park (Big Splash). Please accept this response to both petitions.

I recognise that both petitions highlight important community concerns about the closure of Big Splash, noting this facility is valued for the recreational swimming opportunities it provides including access to water slides. The community has also raised concerns regarding maintenance, safety and viability of re-opening the facility in the future.

It is important to note that the facility is held under a private lease and has been run as a private business operation for many years. The ACT Government's priority has consistently been to bring the operator into compliance with the legislation and to achieve an outcome that delivers clear community benefit and sees reopening of the aquatic facility as soon as possible.

Following regulatory action, Access Canberra, acting as the delegate of the independent Territory Planning Authority, made a decision on 24 April not to terminate the Crown Lease. The independent regulator has set aside the notice associated with potential lease termination. A summary of the reason for decision is publicly available here:

https://www.cmtedd.act.gov.au/open_government/inform/act_government_media_releases/access-canberra/2026/decision-relating-to-potential-enforcement-big-splash

Through Access Canberra's engagement with the operators and multiple site inspections conducted in April 2026, they considered the substantive actions taken by the owners, including site clean-up and repair of the pool infrastructure to and their commitment to re-open the site as an aquatic facility by 1 November 2026. Access Canberra noted that progress on the site to date supports this intention, and that the operators are demonstrating their intention to engage with the community on the future of the site through their appointed representatives.

Importantly for the community, the operators have expressed their intention to continue operating the site as an aquatic facility, retaining the existing 50-metre public pool and associated food amenities.

While Access Canberra has now made the decision not to terminate the Crown Lease, and to set aside their notice, inspectors will remain actively engaged over the coming months to monitor the site and conduct regular site visits to ensure progress against the commitment to see the facility open on 1 November 2026. Access Canberra also reserves the right to take further regulatory action if required.

The ACT Government has announced a review current lease compliance powers available to Access Canberra to ensure the independent regulator has all appropriate contemporary and effective regulatory tools to support lease compliance, protect the integrity of the planning system, and maintain community confidence in the administration of ACT land.

In relation to development activities, Access Canberra understands the operators have indicated an intention to lodge a development application for the removal and demolition of the site's waterslides and some damaged infrastructure including the former kiosk.

No development application has been received by the Territory Planning Authority, and any future proposal would be required to be formally lodged and assessed under the Territory Plan, including public notification processes.

We acknowledge that recreational facilities are valued assets by the community across Canberra and the ACT Government continues to have no intention to rezone the site away from PRZ2: Restricted Access Recreation Zone.

I reiterate that it is Government's expectation that the aquatic facility is opened on 1 November for the 2026–27 summer swimming season.

I trust this information is of assistance.

Swimming pools—deep-water pools—petitions 3-26 and 18-26

By **Mr Barr**, Chief Minister, dated 24 May 2026 in response to a petition lodged by Mr Emerson on 24 February 2026 concerning diving and deep-water facilities in a new aquatic centre.

The response read as follows:

Dear Mr Duncan

Thank you for your letter concerning Petitions E-PET-003-26 and PET-018-26, lodged by Mr Thomas Emerson MLA on Tuesday 24 February 2026, regarding Diving and Deep-Water Facilities in New Aquatic Centre.

The ACT and Australian governments have jointly committed \$137.8 million to plan and deliver a new aquatic recreation facility in Commonwealth Park to meet the needs of our growing population. This is a landmark partnership between the ACT and Federal Labor Governments which, in conjunction with the joint funding provided for a new Convention and Entertainment Precinct, represents the biggest investment in Canberra's civic and cultural infrastructure in more than a generation.

The new Canberra Aquatic Centre in Commonwealth Park, will provide a modern aquatic facility for the Territory and bring more people into the park. It also unlocks the land needed to deliver the Convention and Entertainment Precinct, with a larger convention centre and an integrated 8,000 seat Entertainment Centre for live music, entertainment, and indoor sporting events.

These major city-shaping projects will stimulate economic growth, support major events and jobs, and help create a more vibrant city centre.

In response to the requests made by petitioners, the ACT Government would like to note the following:

1. Amend the proposed indoor Aquatic centre in Commonwealth Park tender to require a 5m deep Dive pool with Springboard and Platform Diving facilities.

The project is currently in an early design phase, and the final scope has not yet been determined. The Government is procuring a delivery partner through a two-stage Early Contractor Involvement (ECI) procurement process, with an initial Request for Expression of Interest (REOI) followed by a Request for Tender (RFT).

The purpose of the REOI is to test market capacity and capability and establish an appropriate shortlist of delivery partners. It outlines key features that will inform consultation and the development of the reference design but does not detail specific design treatments such as pool configuration, diving facilities or other specialist infrastructure. These matters are to be considered through reference design development and the subsequent RFT phase.

The REOI closed on 29 January 2026 and Infrastructure Canberra (iCBR) is currently finalising the assessment process and shortlisting of preferred tenderers.

The shortlisted tenderers will be invited to respond to a Request for Tender (RFT) in a second procurement phase. The RFT documents have yet to be developed, and the timing of resolution and release will allow for further consultation and engagement on the project.

Community and stakeholder consultation to date has identified a range of scope options for the new facility. This includes requests from some stakeholders for a “like-for-like” replacement of features at the existing Civic Pool, including a deep-water pool and 10-metre diving tower. In addition, there has been broad support for a modern aquatic centre captured through community feedback, with common priorities around water play and wellness features, convenient access and parking, location suitability, competition-ready sporting facilities, therapy and rehabilitation spaces, and design inspired by leading examples.

The Government has asked iCBR to undertake further analysis of scope options, including an outdoor five-metre-deep pool and 10-metre diving tower as part of a like-for-like replacement scope option.

As the Canberra Aquatic Centre is being progressed alongside the development of the ACT Aquatic Strategy, the Government is actively considering the inclusion of diving facilities through related design and consultation processes before finalising the project scope for the Canberra Aquatic Centre.

2. Ensure the new facility supports multiple aquatic sports requiring deep water.

The ACT Government, including iCBR, will continue to collaborate with stakeholders to understand the specific needs of different aquatic user groups, as well as broader community needs and aspirations. The Government will engage as further design and cost investigations are undertaken on options that feature a deep-water pool suitable for use by the community and the broad spectrum of deep-water related aquatic sports clubs.

3. Uphold the commitment to the community to provide and maintain existing and essential community sport infrastructure in the ACT.

The ACT Government remains committed to maintaining and investing in essential community sport and aquatic infrastructure across the Territory. The scoping and design of the Canberra Aquatic Centre is being progressed in parallel with the development of the ACT Aquatic Strategy, which will provide an updated, city-wide view of aquatic facility needs as Canberra continues to grow and will replace the existing Aquatic Facilities Planning Framework 2013–2033. This integrated approach will ensure the new centre complements and strengthens the broader network of aquatic facilities, including existing community infrastructure.

The ACT Government will continue to engage with stakeholders throughout the development of the Aquatic Strategy, building on recent community input provided through the Canberra Aquatic Centre design consultation.

**Canberra Health Services—international medical graduates—
petition 6-26**

By **Ms Stephen-Smith**, Minister for Health, dated 24 May 2026 in response to a petition lodged by Mr Emerson on 24 February 2026 concerning international medical

graduates in the ACT.

The response read as follows:

Dear Mr Duncan

Government Response to E-PET-006-26 – Equitable workforce pathways for Australian Citizen International Medical Graduates (IMGs) in the ACT

Thank you for your letter regarding petition E-PET-006-26, lodged by Mr Thomas Emerson MLA, which calls on the ACT Government to consider equitable workforce pathways for Australian Citizen IMGs in the ACT. I apologise for the delay in providing this response.

The complexity of entering the Australian healthcare system for IMGs is acknowledged. This has also been recognised at the national level, with an independent review of Australia's regulatory settings as they relate to health practitioner registration, skill and qualifications of IMGs (the Kruk review). The national Health Workforce Taskforce (HWT) is leading the implementation of the recommendations, including recommendations focused on support and training to prepare for safe practice, as well as evaluating existing support structures for IMGs, particularly in rural settings. Canberra Health Services (CHS) works with the Health and Community Services Directorate (HCSD) to provide input to national implementation of the Kruk review recommendations.

CHS recruitment policy and procedures are guided by the *ACT Public Sector (ACTPS) Recruitment and Policy Guidelines* (2021). The overarching selection process is guided by the merit and equity principles, ensuring all eligible applicants have a fair opportunity to apply, and are selected through comparative assessment of their relevant skills, qualifications and experience that are applicable to the advertised role as well as performance at interview. Where applicable, CHS abides by the relevant immigration legislation as it relates to labour market testing, including ensuring there are no suitable Australian candidates prior to considering offshore IMGs.

CHS undertakes annual recruitment processes for medical officer positions and may receive thousands of applications in a recruitment cycle. It is not standard practice, nor feasible with the current recruitment systems, to report the citizenship status for all applicants to every vacancy, nor each individual recruitment decision. In addition, the citizenship status of individual candidates is considered to be sensitive information that is collected for the purpose of determining whether an individual may have work rights and not the purpose of public reporting. This is particularly the case where, for some specific roles, small numbers of applicants may result in individuals being identifiable.

I also acknowledge that IMGs entering the Australian healthcare system often require additional support. In the 2023-24 ACT Budget, the ACT Government invested more than \$8 million to boost Junior Medical Officer (JMO) wellbeing and supports. This included the establishment of a Medical Chief Wellness Officer and dedicated medical education and support roles for IMGs at CHS. The team has established IMG support and education programs within CHS and is dedicated to assisting over 200 IMGs transition to the Australian healthcare system.

The team is in the early stages of building additional IMG training capability and

has developed a Director of Clinical Training role to oversee all aspects of necessary training. CHS is focused on supporting IMGs employed by the health service and does not currently have supervisor capacity to support formal observership placements in ACT public hospitals in addition to medical student placements. The ACT Government greatly values the contribution of IMGs, who are employed across a wide range of roles within the JMO workforce. In recent years, the recruitment of suitable IMGs – both domestically and internationally – has become increasingly competitive. Despite this, CHS continues to attract highly skilled and appropriately qualified IMGs through its annual processes.

I hope this information is helpful to Members in considering the matters raised in the petition.

Tuggeranong—ice sports facilities—petitions 80-25 and 21-26

By **Ms Berry**, Minister for Sport and Recreation, dated 22 May 2026 in response to a petition lodged by Mr Werner-Gibbins on 24 February 2026 concerning an ice sports facility in Tuggeranong.

The response read as follows:

Dear Mr Duncan

Thank you for your letter about petition No PET-021-26 and e-petition No E-PET-080-25, lodged by Mr Taimus Werner-Gibbins MLA, in regard to the delivery of an ice sports venue in Tuggeranong.

The ACT Government remains committed to the delivery of a new ice sports venue for the Canberra community. The proposed ice sports facility project commenced in 2019 following a Cabinet-endorsed Expression of Interest process to identify a partner to design, build and operate a new facility, resulting in the selection of Cruachan/Pelligra. Between 2020 and 2024, the ACT Government progressed key enabling work for a site in Greenway, including site investigations, environmental approvals and detailed assessment of the proponent's proposal, which supported progression and led to the execution of a non-binding agreement in November 2022.

Progress has since been impacted by a range of factors, including pandemic-related disruptions, delays in the provision of key legal and governance information by the proponent, and the expiry of the initial Environmental Significance Opinion in 2022. Subsequent changes to planning and environmental legislation introduced additional ecological assessment requirements, creating uncertainty regarding site suitability and delaying the progression of binding agreements.

In 2025, draft project documentation, including a proposed Project Agreement, was provided to Cruachan/Pelligra. Further discussions identified ongoing concerns from the proponent regarding the Tuggeranong site and overall project costs, as well as a preference to pursue alternative locations.

The ACT Government has reaffirmed its commitment to Tuggeranong as the preferred site and sought clarification of the proponent's position, including any additional funding requirements. An updated detailed proposal was subsequently requested and submitted by Cruachan/Pelligra in January 2026. This has enabled further assessment and analysis to inform the Government's consideration of next

steps and the future direction of the project.

The ACT Government recognises the importance of transparency and timely delivery for the Tuggeranong and broader Canberra ice sports communities. While negotiations remain subject to commercial-in-confidence requirements and cannot be disclosed in detail, the Government is actively working to progress discussions constructively and in the community's best interests. This includes continuing to engage with the proponent, addressing regulatory requirements where appropriate, and progressing assessment of the updated proposal to ensure informed and timely decision-making on the future of this important community infrastructure.

I will continue to provide quarterly updates in line with this commitment and report on progress accordingly.

Motion to take note of petitions

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

That the petitions and responses so lodged be noted.

Gungahlin United Football Club—petitions 32-26 and 48-26 Macquarie swimming pool—site lease—petitions 4-26 and 20-26

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (10.03): I want to speak briefly about the petition that has gathered 566 signatures online, calling for the government to fully investigate the collapse of the beloved Gungahlin United Football Club.

The club found itself with over half a million dollars in debt, seeing over 2,000 families and players abandoned in October last year. This deserves a full government inquiry, and the petition calls for that government inquiry to take place. Obviously, the petition will go to a committee. The committee itself, I hope, will see the value of inquiring into the collapse of a very significant community sporting club—let alone the collapse itself deserving an inquiry, we do not want to see this happening to any of our other community sporting clubs in Canberra.

I want to thank the principal petitioner, Mr John Mikita, for reaching out to me with a very worthy petition that I do not think should trouble the government, because what government of any state wants to see a significant football club—a significant sporting club—go into serious debt to such a degree that a whole district is without a representative football club.

I am very pleased to have been given a statement from Mr Mikita, which I would like to now read into the record. This is a statement from Mr John Mikita:

On behalf of the former Gungahlin United Football Club families who have lost a club they loved and helped build, we want to sincerely thank the Canberra community for the incredible support we've received and especially Peter Cain MLA for standing up and calling for an inquiry into this devastating collapse.

For so many this isn't just about a football club. It's about our kids, our community and something we poured our time, energy and hearts into which is now all suddenly gone.

There are still so many unanswered questions. How did it happen, why did it happen and could it have been prevented if concerns about the club's financial position were known earlier by Government or Capital Football?

We all deserve answers.

Too often our growing community is left behind. Our sports fields and facilities are deteriorating, grassroots clubs are under pressure, and families are left to pick up the pieces when things fall apart.

Today we are asking every ACT Government MLA to hear our call and support an inquiry into the collapse of Gungahlin United.

We need transparency and accountability. And we need confidence that no other local club or family will be put through this again.

Please support this inquiry for the sake of our families and our kids, and for the future of grassroots football in Gungahlin.

That is the statement provided by Mr John Mikita, the principal petitioner for this petition, which obviously is being lodged today. I look forward to a committee response, and I am very hopeful that the relevant standing committee will conduct an inquiry. I look forward, as well, to when the government provides a response, as is required, to this petition. Quite frankly, there is nothing stopping the government doing a full and thorough independent inquiry off its own bat, as the petition calls for.

Thank you to all those families and supporters who have supported this petition and who remain without answers. This petition is calling for answers.

Mr Speaker, given that I only have one slot to speak to petitions and government responses to petitions, I just want to mention the response to the Big Splash petition, a record-breaking petition, as we have seen. I want to draw members' attention to a community gathering this Saturday afternoon at Big Splash where the convenors of Save Big Splash, Amelia Tattam and friends and family, have called for the community to come and form a human circle around Big Splash. I will be there. My colleague Ms Barry will be there. Let's give Big Splash a big love hug.

Macquarie swimming pool—site lease—petitions 4-26 and 20-26

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (10.09): I am speaking in relation to the government response to the Big Splash petition. I want to congratulate Amelia Tattam, and the Save Big Splash group, who collected 7,510 signatures for that record-breaking petition, and thank you to Dani Hunterford who first brought a petition on the same topic in December 2024. These petitions are led by young Canberrans who know what they want now and what they want for their kids in the future. Canberra wants a waterpark. Governments should listen.

The ACT Labor Government has increasingly relied on the private sector to deliver community facilities, and that is not working. People are tired of losing community facilities to private profit. The community is now acting, and but for their action, I suspect Big Splash would have already been quietly redeveloped into something else

by now.

Government has taken some compliance action. Here are some of the things they have not done: Access Canberra did not terminate the lease; they had grounds to but chose not to. I asked why, and now we have at least got the reasons published. Access Canberra said that the operators have cleaned up the site and are committed to reopen on 1 November 2026.

Forgive my cynicism, but we have heard it before. The operators said they would reopen in November 2024 and then again in November 2025, and they did not. We all watched those same operators let the facility run down, almost as if they wanted an excuse to redevelop.

Let's see if, this time, the pool opens on 1 November 2026. And that commitment is just for the pool, not for the slides; remember, it is the waterpark that Canberra really wants. But even with just the pool, if that pool is not open on 1 November 2026, after three broken promises over three years, surely Access Canberra will consider terminating the lease.

Access Canberra have not issued any fines: no fines. I have asked a few times why, and I am yet to hear a reason. Minister Berry spoke to a town hall and said she wanted to bring back Big Splash. This was a welcome sentiment. It was somewhat undermined afterwards when the community found out Access Canberra and the ACT government were not issuing fines, were not terminating the lease and the operators planned to demolish the slides.

At the same meeting, Minister Berry was asked if government would consider buying back the site and maybe to turn it into a public pool, a public-private partnership and look at some other options. Minister Berry said emphatically, "Nothing was off the table. Nothing." As a member of cabinet, Minister Berry has been briefed on Big Splash and Access Canberra's regulatory action, and I trust she is using her words with care and government really is looking at all the options and nothing is off the table.

I have got a lot of questions outstanding. I asked if government will impose 100 per cent of the lease variation charge if Big Splash is allowed to redevelop. That is the charge we levy when developers profit from a redevelopment. It gives the community some of that gain. We have a good case here to make it the full amount. Government is working on an Aquatic Strategy. Surely, we cannot close an aquatic facility while we are still writing the glossy brochure.

On 7 May, I asked if government has seen the engineering reports about the state of the waterslides and if those engineering reports would form part of any decision about whether to approve or reject an application to demolish the slides. It was good to see that two days later, Ministers Berry and Cheyne posted a letter on socials saying they followed up with the operator to request. It is great they are following up. I am hoping there is a more official channel that makes sure those engineering reports are part of the approval decision, not a letter on socials from ministers who do not have carriage of the project.

I asked if there are any unpaid taxes by Big Splash and if so, how much is unpaid and

what enforcement steps are occurring. I have lodged an FOI to find out whether there was any correspondence between Access Canberra and Ministers Berry and Cheyne on compliance with the Crown lease and what documents were generated between Access Canberra and other areas within the City and Environment Directorate on compliance action.

I have not yet heard back on any of those questions. I will let the community know as soon as we get some of that information, and, of course, the FOI information will be on the disclosure website, so it will be publicly available.

The Assembly backed my motion last year to prevent government from rezoning that site for development and to ensure it remains open for community use, and that same motion committed ACT government to take compliance action.

I acknowledge today's government response to the petition. The rest of the community and I are looking forward, even more, to an outcome where we get our pool back and—if there is any way forward, with all of the options on the table—where Canberra gets a waterpark.

If you would like a pool in a waterpark in Canberra, come along to the Save Big Splash rally this Saturday 30 May at 3.00 pm. All of the community are invited, and that is your chance to tell government what it is that you want now and in the future for Canberra.

Swimming pools—deep-water pools—petitions 3-26 and 18-26

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (10.14): I rise briefly to speak to the government response to Mr Emerson's petition on deep water diving facilities in the new Aquatic Centre. This petition is symptomatic of, I think, a broader issue that has come up frequently throughout the past few years under this ACT Labor government. It follows the pattern of announce, outrage and then consult properly. When the new Canberra Aquatic Centre was formally announced late last year, there was a period of consultation on YourSay. I read through the listening report and, strangely, there was no mention of a diving tower or a deep pool.

Now, given the backlash by the community when Labor ministers announced there would be no dive pool back in January, I do not think this omission in the YourSay was for lack of enthusiasm in the community. I think it might have been put in the too-hard basket. Civic pool users were promised like-for-like to make the Canberra Aquatic Centre pool pill easier to swallow. Commonwealth funding sweetened the deal, and we should keep pursuing that funding, because we do not always pursue commonwealth funding when we should. But no dive pool is not like-for-like. When we talk about pathways to elite sport, we always start at grassroots level. To fail to have a publicly accessible, well-placed diving pool in the city is to say that we are okay with not having the facilities in place for people to discover their passion for diving. In the national capital, I genuinely do not think that is good enough.

So I am pleased to see from the government response to this petition that they have not completely ruled out a deep pool and a diving tower—that they are still working through those options. I am sure that this is due to the strength of the community response, and

full credit to the community for that. It is not the most committed government response, and so I would personally like to undertake to the community that the ACT Greens will continue to push for a dive pool in line with community expectations for the Canberra Aquatic Centre.

**Swimming pools—deep-water pools—petitions 3-26 and 18-26
Canberra Health Services—international medical graduates—
petition 6-26**

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (10.15): I would like to speak to two of the government's responses to petitions. First of all, the one that Miss Nuttall was just speaking to on diving and deep water facilities being included at the new Canberra Aquatic Centre. I want to shout out to everyone who has advocated for this to occur: the Friends of Canberra Olympic Pool; the ACT Aquatic Alliance, especially, who represent the Canberra Diving Academy; Water Polo ACT; Swimming ACT; ACT Triathlon; Canberra Underwater Rugby; ACT Underwater Hockey; and also the people across our community who really rely on the existing facility and value the dive pool that we have there at Civic Pool, and want to see that replicated and want to see a like-for-like replacement at a minimum at the new Canberra Aquatic Centre on Commonwealth Park.

Earlier this year, on 16 January, or thereabouts, we saw the Chief Minister and the Minister for Sport confirming that the new Canberra Aquatic Centre would not include a dive pool. Shortly after that, on 24 January, I was contacted by Ann Widdup from the Canberra Diving Academy to sponsor this petition. That petition was launched not long after. During the following period, the Chief Minister would not make a clear commitment that the old diving pool—the current diving pool, I should say—would not be closed before a new one was opened, which I found concerning.

Shortly thereafter, on 10 February, in Senate Estimates, we heard that the ACT government had actually never raised the idea with the head of the National Capital Authority of putting a diving pool in the planned aquatic facility in Commonwealth Park, and it was not long after that this petition closed with almost 1,500 signatures indicating the level of interest in having that occur. I understand there has been some confusion along the way about what the actual expectation was, and I was really keen to play a role in trying to clear up that confusion, whether the expectation was to include an indoor dive pool, which had been discussed, or whether an outdoor dive pool would be sufficient.

In late February, I stood with Ann Widdup from the Canberra Diving Academy, Matthew Turnbull from the ACT Aquatic Alliance, Oscar Gonzalez from Underwater Rugby, Louise Watson from the Friends of Canberra Olympic Pool and Senator David Pocock, in backing calls for a deep dive pool to be included in the Canberra Aquatic Centre in Commonwealth Park. We wrote to the Chief Minister about that at the same time, indicating a willingness to settle an agreed position where that pool could be an outdoor facility. To the Chief Minister's credit, he expressed an openness to that idea, and I was very pleased to be able to engage with him and his office about this in a constructive way and was happy to see Minister Berry meet with aquatic stakeholders in mid-March to get a better understanding of their expectations for the site and of what is possible on that site.

I am very pleased to see in this response—although it is just an open door; it is not a commitment, as Miss Nuttall pointed out—that the government has asked Infrastructure Canberra to undertake further analysis of scope options, including an outdoor five-metre deep pool and a 10-metre diving tower as part of a like-for-like replacement scope option. I think this should be welcomed.

A lot of politicians get criticised all the time for backflipping, for changing their minds, but I think when it is done in response to community feedback and the mind change leads to a position that actually more clearly aligns with what our community expects and wants from them, we should welcome that and we should celebrate that. Normal people change their minds all the time when faced with new evidence and provided with new feedback, and politicians would benefit sometimes, I think, from being more like normal people, and so I want to welcome this government response today.

I also want to respond briefly to the government response to the Parkinson's nurse petition. This is also a very welcome response. I thank Minister Stephen-Smith for progressing this important work and fulfilling the election commitment to establish this position to provide a dedicated Parkinson's disease nurse for our community. I especially want to thank, though, principal petitioner Jenny Miragaya who has championed this cause on behalf of the Parkinson's community in the ACT and who has really driven this outcome.

My office has spoken with Jenny. She has passed on that she has been consulted in the development of the job application for this position and is expecting the announcement of a successful applicant will be made soon. She is very pleased with this, so I am too. She also mentioned being consulted on the model of care that will be rolled out, although that seems to be yet to be finalised.

Again, I want to thank the minister and her directorate for their work on this and, I really look forward to that impending announcement about this important position having been filled so that the Parkinson's community can start and continue to receive the appropriate level of support that they need and that they deserve.

Macquarie swimming pool—site lease—petitions 4-26 and 20-26
Swimming pools—deep-water pools—petitions 3-26 and 18-26

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (10.20): I want to provide my support to Big Splash and acknowledge its value to the community. It has been a place where families gather, children learn to swim and people of all ages stay active and connected. It plays a vital role in summer recreation, community wellbeing and water safety. With respect to the Aquatic Centre in Commonwealth Park, it is critical that we deliver like-for-like or better facilities. That includes not only recreational features but also proper diving facilities which are essential for training, competition and maintaining Canberra's participation in aquatic sports. We should not lose capability as we move forward. We should strengthen it.

I also want to keep on the agenda the equitable distribution of aquatic facilities across Canberra. I welcome the government's commitment to a new 50-metre pool in Woden, and we are keen to be actively involved in shaping its scope. While we are talking about

changing minds, the government has made a commitment to an outdoor 50-metre pool. I note that there is strong support in the community for a hybrid pool design—a facility that supports year-round swimming but can also open up in summer for natural airflow and access to green spaces and slides to create a more enjoyable place for the community.

Importantly, this is an opportunity to think bigger and plan smarter. We are very keen to see the ice rink retained within Woden. The proposed five-hectare site at the Woden Valley High School, or former Woden Valley High School, offers a unique opportunity to co-locate both an aquatic centre and the ice rink, creating a true multi-sport and community precinct. With thoughtful staged delivery, this site could also include a hydrotherapy pool and a disability gym, helping to complement the tertiary hospital and support rehabilitation and inclusive health outcomes for our growing population. This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity. Let's get the delivery of aquatic facilities right.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Transport—Canberra-Sydney rail

Ministerial statement

MR BARR (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism and Trade) (10.23): I rise this morning to provide the Assembly with an update on the recently announced improvements to the Sydney-Canberra rail corridor. Before I turn to the infrastructure and future planning announcements in the recent federal budget, it is worth beginning with a simple fact. Even with the constraints along the corridor that have existed for many years, the Sydney-Canberra rail service already carries hundreds of thousands of passenger journeys each year.

Those passengers include commuters, students, government travellers, business passengers and a growing number of visitors to the national capital. That level of patronage exists today, despite limited daily services, constrained access into the Sydney metropolitan rail network and infrastructure that, frankly, has not supported reliability or resilience. This alone tells us something important—that the underlying demand for rail travel between Canberra and Sydney is strong.

The rail corridor is not a single, uniform railway. It spans the ACT rail terminus at Canberra, the New South Wales Country Regional Network between Canberra and Goulburn, the Australian Rail Track Corporation-managed main south line through the Southern Highlands, and the Sydney Trains metropolitan network north of Macarthur, including the constrained approach to the Sydney terminus at Central Station. Because of the Federation, each of these sections operates under different conditions, signalling systems and traffic demands.

As services approach Sydney, they move from a long-distance regional environment into one of the most complex and heavily used metropolitan rail networks in Australia. Canberra services must be carefully threaded between high-frequency suburban trains, peak period constraints, maintenance windows and terminal capacity limits.

The interface between the ARTC network and Sydney Trains, particularly between Macarthur and the Sydney terminal precinct, has long been a source of delay and

unreliability, and it is the central reason why infrastructure investment must be considered across the full length of the rail corridor.

Through the Southern Highlands and into Sydney's outer metropolitan area, passenger services share the corridor with substantial freight traffic. Freight trains are longer, heavier, slower to accelerate and decelerate, and they are far more difficult to re-path once delayed. Where overtaking opportunities are limited and signalling flexibility is constrained, passenger services can be delayed, even when running to their scheduled timetable.

Once a Canberra service is delayed entering the Sydney Trains network, recovery becomes far more difficult. Delays can affect platform availability, crew rostering and, of course, the punctuality of returned services. These are structural challenges that require infrastructure solutions, particularly in the Southern Highlands and at the metropolitan interfaces.

Fortunately, a major response to these constraints is in place. The Southern Highlands Overtaking Opportunities project is being delivered by the Australian Rail Track Corporation. This is a \$54 million project that targets one of the most congested sections of the corridor and allows faster passenger services to safely and efficiently overtake the slower freight trains before entering the more constrained parts of the network.

Construction is well underway at Werai, near Moss Vale, and at Joppa Junction, south of Goulburn. The project includes new overtaking infrastructure, additional crossovers, modern signalling systems, and significant track and civil works. Construction commenced back in 2024, and it is expected to be completed in early 2027. This work is not theoretical. It has been funded in previous budgets, it is being delivered now, and it directly addresses longstanding bottlenecks that have affected Canberra services for decades.

Complementing this \$54 million project is the ARTC's \$195 million track rehabilitation program between Albury and Sydney. This also includes extensive works through the Southern Highlands and on the approach into Sydney. This program replaces life-expired rail and sleepers, improves track geometry, addresses rough-ride locations, and reduces the risk of speed restrictions caused by poor track condition. For passengers, this means smoother journeys, fewer unplanned slowdowns and improved reliability. It is particularly important given how difficult it is to recover time once those services enter into the Sydney metropolitan network.

Another critical element of the ARTC's interlocking and signalling upgrade program is designed to enable bi-directional operations. These upgrades are especially important through the Southern Highlands, at the outer metropolitan interface and on the approach into Sydney. Modern signalling allows trains to operate in either direction on either track when required, improving flexibility during incidents, maintenance and congestion. For Canberra services, this improves resilience precisely at the point where the regional trains interact with Sydney's high-frequency suburban network.

Taken together, overtaking infrastructure, track rehabilitation and modern signalling deliver real benefits. They improve on-time arrivals into Sydney, timetable resilience during peak periods, recovery from disruption and passenger confidence in the service.

Returning to patronage, it is important to emphasise this point again. The service already supports hundreds of thousands of passenger journeys each year, with the existing services often sold out well in advance. There is a substantial base of demand, and it exists before the full benefits of the investments that I have just outlined are realised in the coming months and years.

As reliability improves, journey times are reduced, new trains are entering service and express services are proposed to be introduced, there is clear potential, therefore, for significant growth in passenger numbers. This investment program is not just about maintaining the existing service. It is about unlocking latent demand that already exists along this rail corridor.

Improving this corridor is particularly important for inbound tourism to Canberra. Sydney is Canberra's largest visitor market. A reliable and comfortable rail connection allows Canberra to be promoted as an easy, car-free destination for weekend breaks, school and university visits, cultural tourism, conferences and major national events.

Rail will allow visitors to arrive in the inner south of Canberra without long highway drives. For many international visitors, the majority of whom arrive into Australia through Sydney, rail is familiar, it is accessible and it is low stress. A dependable rail service supports increased visitation to our national institutions, stronger event attendance at our tourism events, and flow-on benefits through the accommodation, hospitality and retail sectors in Canberra.

Cost also plays a critical role in travel choice. When the full cost of travel is considered, rail between Sydney and Canberra is already highly competitive. Driving, of course, involves fuel, vehicle wear and tear, toll roads, parking costs, particularly in Sydney, and the personal cost of fatigue on a long highway journey. Air travel, while faster in the air, often comes with higher overall costs once transfers, parking and time overheads are included.

Rail offers predictable pricing, and the ability to work, read or rest through the journey. As service quality improves and express services are introduced, rail's value proposition becomes even stronger, particularly for business travellers, students, families and visitors.

The infrastructure upgrades that I have mentioned, that are being undertaken across the network by different levels of government, are essential preparation for the arrival of the new New South Wales Regional Rail fleet, which is expected to operate on the Sydney-Canberra corridor.

From a passenger perspective, the new trains will offer onboard wi-fi, supporting work, study and trip planning, power and USB charging at each seat, improved comfort and ride quality, modern passenger information systems, and significantly enhanced accessibility features. These improvements with the new rail fleet reflect modern expectations and will be particularly important on a journey between the two cities of several hours.

Mr Speaker, as we know, new trains alone do not deliver better outcomes. Punctuality

and passenger comfort depend on the track condition, signalling reliability, congestion management and, importantly, the ability to recover from disruption. The infrastructure works that are now underway ensure that when the new New South Wales regional trains operate on the Sydney-Canberra route, passengers will experience a genuinely improved service, not just newer rolling stock.

Importantly, as part of the announcements in the federal budget, the New South Wales government has indicated its intention to deliver additional daily services on the Sydney-Canberra corridor as the infrastructure upgrades are completed and the new rolling stock becomes available. Planning and enabling work for these services is already underway.

It is anticipated that two additional daily services are likely to operate as express services, making direct use of the new overtaking infrastructure that is being built right now, and modern signalling to deliver faster and more competitive journey times. We note that the express services will be particularly important for business travel, short-stay visitors and tourism growth, and they represent a practical and achievable next step as the current projects are completed.

Alongside the corridor-wide investments that I have talked about this morning, governments have jointly committed a further \$100 million to deliver improvements on the Goulburn to Canberra section of the network. This funding will support safety upgrades, track and turnout improvements, and station and stabling works.

As planned works along this part of the corridor are delivered, service reliability and network performance will improve further, allowing for incremental journey time reductions and the uplift in service frequency. The new funding includes planning to inform further investments in the network that will deliver even greater journey time reductions and capacity enhancements that directly benefit Canberra services.

I should note that the \$100 million commitment in the federal budget is in addition to the investigations into urban renewal at the Canberra Railway Station that have already been funded under the Urban Precincts and Partnerships Program. A renewed neighbourhood and upgraded, multimodal transport hub in this location will unlock more housing and seamless transfers between local, regional and interstate transport, while, frankly, providing an arrival point at Canberra Railway Station that is a little more befitting of the national capital in the 2030s than the 1960s one that we have now.

Improving the Sydney rail connection is about more than transport performance for the ACT. It supports tourism growth, it strengthens economic and institutional links, it reduces transport emissions, and it enhances our city's accessibility from a major city in Australia to us, the national capital. A modern rail service with the strong patronage that we see today, and clear potential for growth, is a strategic asset for the territory.

The Sydney-Canberra rail corridor is undergoing genuine, system-wide improvement. Work is well underway in the Southern Highlands, on track condition through to Sydney, and at key metropolitan interfaces. The new trains are coming. They are in Australia. They are being tested now. Express services will be enabled. Patronage is strong and poised to grow.

This is about three governments working together to deliver a rail service that meets modern expectations, that supports inbound tourism and reflects Canberra's role as the national capital. It is an investment in connectivity, in confidence, and in unlocking the next phase of growth for rail travel to and from Canberra.

I present the following paper:

Canberra-Sydney rail—Ministerial statement, 26 May 2026.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

MS TOUGH (Brindabella) (10.38): I want to thank the Chief Minister for his ministerial statement this morning, not just because I really like trains, but because I have constituents who love trains and who are frequent users of the Canberra-Sydney rail line. I want particularly to thank Andrew and Daryl, and the many others who consistently raise the rail line with me through email, mobile offices, at the Tuggeranong Community Council, and in many other forums, and talk about both the benefits of this rail line and how we can definitely make it better.

On their behalf, I have written to the Chief Minister on several occasions about the line and ways to improve it, asking that he ask New South Wales to give us more services and more carriages. It was good to hear in that update that they are on their way, and that New South Wales is doing what it can. It would be nice if it could come quicker, given the current fuel situation, but it is welcome to know that things are in motion for this to happen.

I quite enjoy catching the train between Sydney and Canberra. I last did it in October last year, to make it back for committee hearings during the school holidays. I did a whole day of public transport, from Wynyard to Central on the train, then the wonderful Central to Canberra line, staring out the window, being able to work, being able to read on quite a packed service, and then catching the bus from the station, all the way down to Conder. I have written to Minister Steel a few times about having better connectivity through the station. I see this as a wonderful way of integrating public transport for us to get to and from Sydney.

From experience, and from what my constituents constantly tell me, if you do not plan your trip early enough, you may miss out on a seat on your preferred service. It can get really busy. It is a really popular service. The constant complaints are about getting stuck behind freight trains, and delays getting into Sydney. The time it takes is slower than the bus, and it is slower than driving. For a lot of people, even with that time issue, it is still a better mode of transport to get to Sydney. You get right into the heart of the city and, as the Chief Minister said, you do not need to pay for parking; you do not need to deal with all those other inconveniences of Sydney.

I really welcome this update. I look forward to the changes on the rail corridor to make the service faster and more efficient, so that more people can enjoy the train to Sydney and back in the future.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Sport and recreation—sportsground maintenance—update Ministerial statement

MS BERRY (Ginninderra—Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Education and Early Childhood, Minister for Homes, Homelessness and New Suburbs and Minister for Sport and Recreation) (10.41): I rise today to update the Assembly on the condition and maintenance of ACT sportsgrounds and the ongoing work to ensure that these important community assets remain sustainable and fit for purpose.

The ACT government manages more than 100 community sporting fields, totalling more than 280 hectares, comprising 884 individual, hireable sportsgrounds. This network supports more than 300 user groups each year, and the demand for these important community facilities continues to be exceptionally high.

This year, more than 47,000 booked hours have been recorded so far, which is a nine per cent increase compared to this time last year. In addition to formal bookings, there is also significant informal community use at non-enclosed venues, such as Kaleen, Dickson, Mawson, Kambah and Calwell. This additional use of sportsgrounds adds further pressure on playing surfaces that is not reflected in booking data.

As Minister for Sport and Recreation, I am proud to see such strong community sport and recreation participation in the ACT and, I am also proud to say, the highest rates of participation in the country. This level of activity naturally presents challenges for the maintenance and sustainability of our sportsgrounds.

The ACT government delivers a planned maintenance program to support suitable and reliable playing surfaces across the territory, including a comprehensive, biannual sportsground shutdown. This program enables essential maintenance, renewal and operational works to ensure that facilities remain functional and fit for community use.

During these shutdown periods, works include turf restoration activities, such as fertilisation and aeration, irrigation system inspections, and floodlight maintenance, including repairs and replacements where required. This program also delivers critical operational improvements, including installation and removal of goalposts, pavilion and facility repairs, relocation of temporary sporting infrastructure, and coordination with user groups to support equipment storage and access. Together, these efforts ensure that ACT sportsgrounds meet community expectations while supporting participation in local, state and national sporting activities.

In addition to the maintenance schedule, the changing seasonal conditions present challenges for managing turf that barely gets a rest period. Warmer than usual temperatures have now extended into the cooler months. As temperatures decline, many sportsgrounds appear brown, reflecting its natural dormancy, but that also means that it reduces the turf's ability to recover as quickly during winter.

Maintenance delivery is also affected by usage patterns. High-intensity use, particularly where training and competition occur on the same fields, reduces turf recovery time and accelerates wear in common parts of fields. The transition between summer and winter sports has also become less distinct, with extended seasons or new sporting events or

competitions reducing opportunities for full field renovation and rest between seasons. In addition, unplanned damage from e-bikes and other unauthorised vehicle access or general vandalism requires immediate repair to maintain the surface condition.

Recent pressures on the sportsground network are evident at sites such as Kambah 201 and Calwell 204, where high use, environmental conditions and drainage infrastructure constraints have impacted surface quality. I am happy to update the Assembly that targeted remediation works are now underway at both of those ovals. This includes reseeded with winter-hardy rye grass, turf repairs and protective treatments to accelerate recovery and restore the playing conditions. Both grounds are temporarily closed and are expected to return to match play from 30 May.

The City and Environment Directorate continues to work closely with clubs, peak sporting bodies and other users to maintain field allocations and sportsground maintenance, and balance competing priorities across the network.

The ACT government is taking practical and considered steps to address current challenges. This includes directing resources to the areas of greatest need, bundling works geographically to improve efficiency and value, and leveraging technology and innovation—such as robotic line marking and smart irrigation systems—to enhance long-term sustainability where we can.

I acknowledge that this system is not perfect, but it is a system that is willing to learn and adapt. The level of demand, changing conditions and competing expectations mean there will always be pressures and, at times, differing views on how field access and maintenance are managed. That is why strong, respectful relationships with clubs, peak bodies and the community are so important.

The ACT government is committed to working constructively with all users of our sportsgrounds, listening to their concerns, responding where we can, and continually refining our approach. This is an ongoing effort, and I am focused on making sure we are getting the balance right. We also remain firmly committed to maintaining community sportsgrounds that meet the needs of our highly active community, now and into the future.

I present the following paper:

Sportsgrounds—Ministerial statement, 26 May 2026.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

MR MILLIGAN (Yerrabi) (10.47): I thank Minister Berry for providing her statement on sportsground maintenance in the ACT. Sportsground maintenance is crucial to a thriving and active city. The key issue in this space for any government is to ensure that the facilities that they manage on behalf of the public are maintained to a high standard. It is unfortunate, though, that that is currently not the case.

When I am out and about, talking to users, sporting clubs and associations, I often hear

about the sporting facilities crisis here in the ACT. A key part of this crisis is a substandard level of maintenance. This is reflective of a tired government which has not kept pace with the changing and innovative sporting community.

A good example of this is the current maintenance schedule. As the minister referred to in her statement, Canberrans are changing how they use sportsgrounds throughout the year. Sporting competitions are running for longer, and residents are using our sportsgrounds informally more often. This shows that the community is keen to play more—play more frequently and play for longer periods of time.

The current sportsground maintenance schedule was introduced by this government back in the mid-2010s and there has not been a substantial update since then. Perhaps it is time for the government to develop a new approach to how it maintains these community assets.

Another way to help ease the overwhelming pressure on the current sportsgrounds would be for the government to build more and/or reactivate some of those sportsgrounds that were closed by them back in the early 2000s. Unfortunately, this has also not occurred since the 2010s.

Does anyone here know when was the last time that the Labor government delivered a new sportsground in the ACT? In my electorate, back in April 2014, the government built the Gungahlin Enclosed Oval. Since then, the government has only upgraded existing spaces, such as Taylor playing fields in my electorate, and a few other fields around the territory.

We in the opposition often talk about the budget deficit and how it is hurting the territory. The government is also in a sportsgrounds deficit. We are all aware that this Labor government shut down 32 public ovals which were used by the community in the early 2000s. However, since then, the government has only opened a handful of those ovals.

These factors and many more are why, in February, I called on the government to conduct an independent audit into sporting and recreation facilities in the ACT. This review would assess whether the current facilities are fit for purpose, as well as identifying gaps in the current facilities. I thank the minister for engaging with my office since then about the audit and how it will be conducted. However, I am disappointed about the length of time it has taken so far. We are talking about back in February this year; we are now approaching June.

In the recent communication from the minister, the minister identified four bureaucratic obstacles that they need to navigate before they go ahead. The community are asking for this audit; sporting clubs, associations and users are asking for this audit. This will be a great opportunity for them to provide feedback in terms of our facilities, where the gaps are and what needs to be done.

The current issues with maintenance identified in the minister's statement largely stem from a failure to plan for the future by both this Labor government and previous Labor governments, going back a quarter of a century. That is why it is important that we move forward with this audit as soon as possible, so that we can start planning for the

future.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (10.51): I will begin by acknowledging the minister's statement on the temporary closure and repair of heavily used ovals and ovals that have been wrecked by e-bikes. No-one wants to see our community sportsgrounds deteriorate, and I recognise the importance of investment in their recovery. But the very pressures that the minister outlined—record demand, overuse and limited recovery time—also point to a deeper issue. We simply do not have enough appropriately planned infrastructure in our growth areas. Nowhere is this clearer than in Molonglo.

The government highlights strong participation rates, and I agree that it is something to be proud of, but in Molonglo it is also proof that existing facilities are not keeping up with demand. With the growing population already exceeding 19,000 people and projected to reach 79,000, the need for proper sporting infrastructure is urgent.

This has only been compounded by the scaling back of the playing fields at Stromlo Forest Park. These fields no longer meet the definition of district playing fields, meaning Molonglo has effectively been left without the level of infrastructure that it was promised. That is why we must plan for new, properly scaled, centralised playing fields within Molonglo—facilities that are accessible, including by public transport, and designed to meet both current and future demand.

Right now, local clubs are relying on shared facilities like Stirling Enclosed Oval, leading to overuse, scheduling conflicts and declining conditions—the very issues outlined in the minister's statement. While the clubs are paying high fees for the use of this oval, the government will not fix the broken scoreboard, claiming that it is owned by the club. If the government charges for the use of these enclosed ovals, it should provide the amenity needed to play games. That includes a scoreboard. This is not just a maintenance problem; it is a planning problem.

The community has a petition that simply asks the government to revisit its assumptions, in addition to the small fields at Stromlo Forest Park, to identify a suitable site for centralised district playing fields in Molonglo and commit to delivering fit-for-purpose fields for the community.

If we are serious about supporting participation, strengthening clubs and building communities, we must invest where growth is happening. Molonglo deserves no less.

MR PARTON (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (10.54): I have to say, I am kind of blown away that, at a time when there is so much genuine frustration, angst and anger from grassroots sporting organisations and people in the suburbs about the state of sportsgrounds, the minister stands in this place and says, "It's all going well. There's nothing to see here." I am staggered that we have a live situation involving multiple incidents where vandals have taken it upon themselves to tear up sportsgrounds with cars and e-bikes. One of those incidents involved young people invading a sportsground during competitive matches on the weekend, and that component of what is going on has occupied one sentence of the ministerial statement. The sporting community is collectively taking stock and trying to pick up the pieces as best they can after long-term maintenance failures and vandalism, and the minister stands up here with a straight face and says, "Everything's hunky-dory." It is not. I do not really understand the point of

this statement, and I would say to the minister, to quote Ronan Keating—I will not go there.

I want to go to some comments on my social media posts about the current crisis facing ACT's sportsgrounds. Becc said:

We had a P-Plate driver and his mates drive the car onto Warramanga lower ovals (twice) whilst we were training at 7.30pm a couple of weeks ago....we filmed and reported to police! Then a week or so later someone broke into the canteen and storage sheds stole most of the food and drinks and a bunch of training gear ...

Michael said, "Law and order Canberra style." Martin said, "Has Andrew Barr even heard of Kambah?" Peta said, "Waramanga seems to be popular with the lime scooters." Hugh said, "It's not just frustrating for Tuggeranong United. It affects every other Capital Football club. Safe fields aren't something we should have to keep begging the ACT government to provide. It's a similar sad story over the conditions of fields all over Canberra."

Karen said, "They're also targeting Oztag and AFL grounds in Belconnen too during week nights for games and training. We've reported to police a few times." Crystal said, "Check out the baseball fields at the ACT Eagles in Kambah. We have to mow the diamond and outfield ourselves most weekends. Wouldn't it be great if the ACT government invested in community sport like it invests in some other things." Nichol said, "I've seen this damage all over the ACT. The time has come to do something. It's completely out of control."

Paul commented with a different perspective. He lived in Canberra for a decade. He has now moved to Wagga, and he speaks of the amazingly successful approach to ground maintenance in Wagga to prove that it can be done if there is a willingness to listen. Specifically, with regard to the two-week shutdown in the statement from Ms Berry, 10 working days to do maintenance on 884 individual high-level sportsgrounds seems like a big ask to me.

The minister is clearly not listening to the sports community, and I think it is time for someone here to listen. It is clear that there needs to be a whole-of-government response, so my announcement this morning is that we will be holding a roundtable of sporting clubs and organisations. We will be doing it next week. It will give representatives of clubs the chance to air their concerns about maintenance and vandalism, and, most importantly, as a group, to find some solutions. This minister and this government are only interested in papering over the cracks and looking the other way, and it is not good enough.

We understand that we are talking about volunteer organisations, and, as such, this roundtable is going to be held after hours. I am announcing this morning that, as Leader of the Opposition, along with the shadow minister for sport and rec, Mr Milligan, we will be holding a roundtable for sporting club representatives at 6 pm next Thursday at the Southern Cross Club in Woden. We are aiming to get to the nitty-gritty of the problems and to work towards some solutions—something that the government seems incapable of doing. I repeat: 6 pm at the Southern Cross Club in Woden on Thursday next week. The minister is, of course, welcome to attend.

Ms Berry: I will. Thanks for the invite.

MR PARTON: No worries. At the end of the day, we are just trying to find a way out. Watch the socials because we will post details there, and you will have the ability to let us know that you are coming, because we just want to know for numbers. It is time to listen and it is time to find some solutions.

MS TOUGH (Brindabella) (10.59): I thank the minister for the update on sportsgrounds. I recently met with both the Tuggeranong United Football Club and the Brindabella Blues Football Club about the fields at Kambah and Calwell. I am glad work is underway to restore the fields that are out of action, and I know that the clubs are too. They welcome the meetings they have had with the minister and the directorate to get things underway.

I know it is very disruptive for clubs and players when matches are cancelled at the very last minute and need to be moved to other parts of Canberra, and I know that it causes a lot of frustration in the community when this occurs, particularly for young people who have to cancel work or are no longer able to play because they cannot cancel work, or they have to get themselves to other parts of the city and need to arrange transport to do so. A few weekends ago when both Kambah and Calwell fields were offline on the same weekend, there was a lot of frustration. Clubs reached out to me at that time. I am really glad there is some work underway for those two clubs, particularly because the derby that was meant to be held between Tuggeranong United and Brindabella Blues could not occur in Tuggeranong that weekend as they had hoped, but they were able to find another venue to have that game go ahead.

There has been huge disruption for women's football in Tuggeranong with the disruption at sports fields. I thank the constituents who have reached out to me on women's sport, the facilities and what is happening with women's sport on the ground as well. I also thank the minister's office for being really engaged in discussing that.

It also has a flow-on effect for the clubs. When I met with Tuggeranong United, we talked about the flow-on effects to the canteen when a field is closed. If they do not have games on that field that day, the canteen does not operate at its full capacity and the club does not make money, and then that flows on to who their suppliers are for the canteen, and butchers only sell half as much to the club. So it has a big flow-on effect for the community. That is why I welcome the minister's statement today on what is going forward for sports fields and what we can do.

It turns out I am now a soccer mum. I spend many weekends at the playing field at Calwell, watching my son play soccer and watching his friends play soccer. It is a really fun experience. I grew up on the sidelines of soccer fields when my brother played. Sport is such a great thing to bring the community together. Even if you are completely clumsy like me and not very good at sport, the atmosphere at a sporting field on a weekend with community sport is a wonderful place. We celebrate that and it is something we need to encourage further. I thank the minister for the work that she is doing. I think it is important going forward that there is a really good relationship between clubs, their peak bodies and the government as well. I welcome this update.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Canberra and Region Heritage Festival 2026

Ministerial statement

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage and Minister for Transport) (11.02): I rise today to address the Assembly on the 2026 Canberra and Region Heritage Festival. Now in its 43rd year, the Canberra and Region Heritage Festival remains one of the ACT government’s longest-running and most loved community festivals. From 11 April to 10 May 2026, Canberrans and visitors explored the places, stories and people that have shaped our city and the surrounding region, and I am pleased to report on the success of this year’s festival.

This year’s theme was “Mid-Century: Innovation, Change and Optimism”, aligning closely with my recent statement of heritage priorities—particularly, protecting Canberra’s unique mid-century modernist homes which feature in many established suburbs in Canberra. The theme invited the community to explore a defining era that transformed Canberra—an era characterised by post-war optimism, sweeping national reform, the Cold War and the space race. It was a period when Canberra came of age as a modern capital. Confidence in planning, design, science and public purpose shaped ambitious ideas about how people should live, work and gather. Those ideas remain with us today, and we see them reflected in our neighbourhoods, public buildings, landscapes and homes.

This year’s program featured 158 events delivered by 96 event holders across Canberra and the surrounding region. Many events sold out quickly, reflecting both strong demand and the high quality of experiences on offer. The ACT government’s digital promotion campaign for the festival resulted in more than 2,000 program downloads from their festival website. Alongside the ACT government’s promotion of the festival, event holders and community groups shared photos and stories about mid-century Canberra on their own platforms, helping to build a real sense of excitement around the festival.

Around 30 per cent of ticketed events sold out. The first to do so was the Hyatt’s “The Disappearing Diplomat”, a Cold War interactive mystery solved over cocktails and canapes. Canberrans and visitors could choose from guided walks in the festival, rare access tours, exhibitions, talks, open days, film screenings, creative workshops, and celebrations of culture, music and fashion. Together, these events explore First Nations heritage, our natural and rural landscapes, social history, migration, science, design, planning and modernist architecture.

I would particularly like to acknowledge the support of the Canberra Museum and Gallery, CMAG, which hosted seven events during the festival, including a Q&A that debunked many of the myths surrounding the conservation of modernist homes. I would also like to thank CMAG for extending the run of the “Taglietti: Life in Design” exhibition so that it could continue throughout the festival before moving interstate. The exhibition significantly enhanced public access to the work of one of Canberra’s most influential modernist architects and strengthened the festival’s focus on modern heritage. From the Dickson Library to Flynn Primary School and many more local

recognisable buildings around Canberra, Taglietti's designs have left an enduring legacy in Canberra's streets and our communities. His work reflects a distinctive vision, one that blends functionality with bold creativity and continues to shape the daily lives of Canberrans in subtle and meaningful ways. Exhibitions like this remind us that architecture is not just about structures but also about stories, relationships and the lived experiences of people who inhabit these spaces. They challenge us to think about how we design for the future while respecting the legacy of the past.

During the festival there were many outstanding events on offer, making it difficult to single out just a few here today, but I want to acknowledge and thank the National Trust of Australia, ACT, for its ongoing contribution to the festival and heritage in Canberra. The open day at Gungahlin Homestead, held on the first day of the festival, was particularly successful. I acknowledge your presence at the opening, Mr Assistant Speaker Mr Cain. It drew large crowds and offered rare access to a site rich in First Nations history, pastoral history and the broader history of our city.

Another highlight was the National Trust's 2026 ACT Heritage Oration, delivered by renowned broadcaster, writer and modernist architecture enthusiast Tim Ross at the National Film and Sound Archive. His oration "Saving the Suburbs" offered a compelling and accessible exploration of the value of mid-century and modern housing and of the challenges of retaining heritage character while accommodating change. Ross's passion for modern design and his ability to connect architecture to everyday experiences resonated strongly with the audience in a packed crowd at the National Film and Sound Archive. It also reinforced the relevance of modern heritage to contemporary conversations about housing, planning and sustainability, and his message served as a timely reminder that good design and thoughtful preservation are essential to maintaining the liveability and identity of our communities.

The festival also continued its strong regional focus, with events held in Goulburn, Yass, Gunning, Queanbeyan and Wee Jasper, from heritage affairs and artwork shops to theatre screenings and local history tours. Regional events played a vital role in showcasing shared stories and strengthening our cross-border connections.

I acknowledge that the period that we often describe as mid-century, from the 1940s through to the late 1960s and early 70s, was a time of optimism, change and growth for Canberra and the nation, but it was also a time when injustices were felt by many in our community. I acknowledge that this was the reality for people in our First Nations communities around the country and here locally. Although the 1967 referendum was a significant moment in our shared history, it did not end the inequity and discrimination experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

I also acknowledge that many new arrivals to Australia during this period were not always welcomed, even as they introduced new ideas, cultures and skills that helped to shape a richer and more diverse Australian way of life. These more difficult and complex histories sit alongside the optimism of the era and deserve to be acknowledged and understood. That is why exploring our heritage through festivals like the Heritage Festival matter so much. It gives us the opportunity to listen, reflect and engage with compassion, to understand other people's stories and to see our past in all its complexities.

Knowing our heritage helps us to have meaningful conversations about who we are and who we want to be as a society. The question about who we want to be was central to Canberra's rapid development during the mid-century period. The city embraced a bold vision for a modern, purpose-built capital, and the modernist ideals of innovation, functionalism and progressivism led to ambitious residential and public architecture that pushed the boundaries of design both within Australia and internationally. These striking individual buildings were crafted by some of Australia's most celebrated modernist architects. Many of these places are now listed on the ACT Heritage Register due to their enduring significance and role in shaping the unique urban identity of the vibrant city that we recognise today. Protecting and understanding this heritage remains an important responsibility as we manage growth and change for the territory's future.

I want to acknowledge the important role of the ACT Heritage Council in the delivery of this year's festival. Council members actively supported the Heritage Festival each year through their engagement with the community and fostering greater understanding of how heritage is identified and protected in the territory. During the 2026 festival, the council had three significant provisional heritage registration decisions open for public comment: the Canberra precast concrete bus shelters, designed by Clem Cummings; Urambi Village in Kambah; and Wybalena Grove in Cook. All are distinctive modernist designs from the mid-1970s that shaped everyday life in Canberra, from public transport infrastructure to cooperative housing. I commend the Heritage Council for inviting community feedback on these designs and for reinforcing that provisional registration is a consultative process that values public input alongside their expert assessment.

Finally, I extend my sincere thanks to the volunteers, community groups and heritage organisations, traditional custodians, national institutions, small businesses and government partners who made the 2026 Canberra Region Heritage Festival possible. I also thank the heritage and communications staff within the City and Environment Directorate for their work in delivering another outstanding festival. The success of the 2026 Canberra and Region Heritage Festival demonstrates that heritage is not just about the past; it is about connection, learning and shaping our shared future.

I present the following paper:

2026 Canberra and Region Heritage Festival—Ministerial statement, 26 May 2026.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Roads—Safety

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) (11.12): I am pleased to use this ministerial statement

today to table the ACT Road Safety Report Card 2025 and to provide an overview of the new ACT Road Safety Framework 2026-2031. The report card marks the close of reporting under the ACT Road Safety Strategy 2020-2025 and the Road Safety Action Plan 2024-25, and it outlines the activities delivered and progressed in 2025 to improve safety on our roads. The new framework sets out how the government will approach the complex challenge of road safety over the next five years.

First I go to the report card. Due to a historical lag in crash data, the 2025 report card reflects 2024 data. That lag is significant. It means the report card is always reporting on a different metric, which lessens the value of that work. Later in this speech, I will return to how the new framework addresses this by improving how we capture, analyse and report data.

In 2024, 11 people lost their lives on ACT roads. Five were motorcyclists and two were cyclists, highlighting the very real risks faced by vulnerable road users. The ACT continues to have a lower fatality rate than the national average—2.32 deaths per 100,000 people, compared to 4.78 nationally. However, fatalities peaked at 18 in 2022, and that was followed immediately by a 20-year low in 2023, when there were just four deaths. The 11 deaths in 2024 represented a sharp increase. These are not just numbers; each is a life lost—someone with family, friends and a future that should not have been cut short. Any death on our roads is one too many.

I am pleased to say that we made significant efforts to improve safety in 2025 through cross-jurisdictional efforts, targeted infrastructure investments, and measures to drive behaviour change. A key pillar of any road safety is safer infrastructure—upgrading arterial and collector roads with new signals, medians, resurfacing, pedestrian facilities and active travel links. Projects across Streeton Drive, Namatjira Drive, Heysen Street and Tharwa Drive are reducing risk, easing congestion and improving access for all road users.

Targeted safety improvements across the network included a new roundabout at Tharwa Drive and Norman Lindsay Drive, pedestrian crossing upgrades, cycling-route safety works, and installation of road safety barriers and audio-tactile line marking. Nineteen road projects have also been approved for funding in 2026 under the commonwealth government's Black Spot Program, targeting locations of known or potential danger. These projects are informed by nominations from government, industry and the community, targeting dangerous road locations where crashes are occurring or are at risk of occurring. Anyone can nominate a black spot, including state and territory governments, local governments, community groups and associations, road user groups, industries and individuals. For the ACT, that program is chaired by Alicia Payne.

The Kings Highway Road Safety Partnership has strengthened cross-border cooperation between the ACT and New South Wales, coordinating enforcement, sharing intelligence and delivering consistent safety messaging. During major holiday operations like at Easter and Christmas, thousands of roadside drug and alcohol tests were jointly conducted by ACT and New South Wales police, together with vehicle compliance checks and towing inspections undertaken by Access Canberra's Vehicle Safety Standards team. The ACT government and ACT Policing continue to deliver coordinated operations like these, together with education campaigns to target

dangerous and antisocial driving.

Too often, however, we continue to see behaviour that puts lives at risk. In just the past week, Canberrans have seen shocking examples, including a ute driving on the wrong side of the road, which resulted in multiple collisions. And, of course, we have heard about the terrible behaviour on sportsgrounds. These are not momentary lapses; they are decisions—decisions which could, and do, cost lives. Since November 2025, our mobile device detection cameras have been able to identify seatbelt offences, including incorrect wearing of one. Up to 80 offences per day have been detected. This is deeply concerning, particularly when four of the 11 people who died in 2024 were not wearing seatbelts.

In the decade to 2023, nearly half of drivers and riders involved in fatal crashes were impaired by drugs or alcohol. Legislative reforms in 2024 strengthened penalties and expanded roadside drug testing, including for cocaine from 1 January 2025. In 2025, ACT Policing conducted over 114,000 breath tests and nearly 3,500 drug tests, resulting in 617 drink driving and 617 drug driving charges. More than 130 tests were positive for cocaine.

The message is clear: risky behaviour continues to drive road trauma. This is why more must be done. The new ACT Road Safety Framework 2026-2031 sets that direction, establishing a single six-year policy to guide our efforts. Vision Zero is not abstract, and the commitment to no deaths or serious injuries by 2050 is a responsibility that demands urgency and sustained action. Despite our efforts to date, the need for urgency and sustained action remains very high. Since 2020, 69 lives have been lost and thousands more people injured. In January and February this year alone, six people lost their lives. This is the highest number for the first two months of the year since self-government. The road toll now stands at nine—equal to the total for all of 2025 in just five months. This is unacceptable and a different approach is required, and this framework delivers that different approach.

A broad range of existing evidence and insights from across government and community sectors has informed the contemporary evidence base to inform the framework, including input gathered through related policy development on transport, active travel and infrastructure; Assembly inquiries; budget submissions; and community surveys. To complement this, in early 2025 we undertook a YourSay Panel survey that sought further information on key road safety topics such as the general safety of ACT roads, the effectiveness of road safety initiatives, motorcycle safety, seatbelt safety, roadworks safety and learning to drive. With a statistically significant and representative sample of over 1,900 Canberrans, the survey provided valuable additional insights that were critical to the framework's development. I thank the panel for their continued engagement and valuable support of ACT government initiatives.

A listening report is now available on the City Services website which provides further detail on how consultation and engagement findings were integrated into the framework. It has been designed to ensure a community and cross-sector feedback loop. This is a framework that has been tested, iterated and validated through multiple tranches of engagement with key road safety partners. I particularly thank Access Canberra, Roads ACT and ACT Policing for their valuable insights and contributions to this process and thank the ACT Road Safety Advisory Board for their expert input.

The framework is built on the Safe System approach. The Safe System approach has six interconnected objectives: safer roads, safer speeds, safer vehicles, safer people, integrated post-crash care, and effective road safety management. Each of these objectives is clearly defined, with practical actions aligned to national best practice. In frank terms, it means our approach reflects what we know works. Importantly, the Safe System approach means that, if one safeguard fails, others are in place to prevent death or serious injury. This is a framework that replaces multiple overlapping and, in some cases, duplicative strategies with a single coherent plan. The framework includes stronger recognition of road safety impacts across government domains, and it refreshes and elevates internal road safety governance across directorates, reflecting the intricate stakeholder base and that responsibility does not lie with just one team.

However, we have also been careful to ring-fence the scope of the framework. This ensures the focus is on road safety and does not creep into, for example, broader transport, infrastructure or planning policy. It is a framework that is clear and serves a distinct purpose without trying to be everything to everyone. Importantly, it strengthens governance and reporting, including the development of a central road safety dashboard and more detailed performance indicators. This includes an action to introduce a central road safety dashboard and develop dedicated safety performance indicators, or SPIs, that go beyond our existing high-level indicators. These will consider our local context in more detail, and it means we will be better able to track what is working and report to the community with a greater level of accountability on our progress. It also gives us greater flexibility to respond to emerging risks over time, particularly as guidance on Safe System and Vision Zero continues to progress over the next six years. Perhaps most critically, it also means our focus shifts from outputs to outcomes: measuring whether the initiative actually improves safety rather than just recording whether the initiative has been delivered.

Finally, the framework improves alignment of the ACT's road safety policy cycle with the national policy cycle. The current national strategy term ends in 2030, with a new national strategy expected in 2031. Staggering our future policy development to start in 2032 will ensure the ACT can contribute meaningfully to the national policy conversation as it is refreshed, and then we can incorporate any of the national commitments and obligations into the ACT policy for 2032 onwards.

The work articulated in this framework will take time, as any new approach does, but the framework establishes a pathway for the ACT's work in this space over the next six years. Better data, clearer accountability, a shared understanding of risk, and targeted action where the risk is highest ultimately creates the foundation for safer ACT roads for all road users.

In closing, I warmly thank and acknowledge the exceptional work of Kate Brennan and Bronwyn Meek in the City and Environment Directorate, whose expertise and dedication over the past two years have been instrumental in the development of this new road safety framework. Their professionalism, expertise and commitment to improving safety outcomes for the Canberra community has resulted in a framework which is already receiving significant recognition and acclaim and sets a new standard. This achievement is not only testament to their hard work but also points to the strength and capability of the ACT public service more broadly. With every death and serious

injury on our roads being preventable, this framework strengthens our resolve, as a government and as a community, to reduce that toll, to change behaviour, and to save lives.

I present the following papers:

ACT Road Safety Report Card 2025, undated.
New Road Safety Framework—Ministerial statement, 26 May 2026.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the papers.

MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi) (11.25): I would like to make a few remarks on the minister's statement. I would like to draw the Assembly's attention to one phrase in the statement, and that is "safer speeds". This is, of course, a euphemism—the minister is spinning something to sound positive when it is something the government knows the community might hate or will hate; I do not know. I think people in our electorate are pretty concerned about it. When the government speak of safer speeds, they do not intend to make our 80 kilometre zones safer by improving the roads and by ensuring they are better maintained or by lifting the education standards for new drivers; no, they are talking about an intention to lower speeds across the territory.

We know this is their intention, because federal Labor colleagues, led by the commonwealth Minister for Infrastructure, have been busy progressing work to reduce speed limits across sealed and unsealed roads in built-up areas and rural areas alike. All of this work is based on the objective, which we share, of safer roads. We obviously want to reduce road fatalities and ensure that people can move about the territory safely and they can get home each day to their loved ones. But the commonwealth's consultation really only considers one way of achieving that outcome, and that is by reducing speed limits.

One regulatory analysis undertaken by the Department of Infrastructure last year was quite explicit in why this is the case: speed limits are a whole lot cheaper for government than other interventions. Sealing roads, installing roadside barriers and erecting median barriers are all really expensive. Signage, properly maintaining the roads and fixing potholes is really expensive. Reducing speed limits, on the other hand, is a one-off cost. You do replace all of the signs but, after that, it is actually revenue positive, because you can stack up fines and penalties on motorists.

The minister has not actually said that the government is moving to adopt lower speeds here in the territory but, when she speaks of safer speeds, when the Labor federal government is pushing speed limit reductions, when the Labor Victorian government is adopting 30 kilometre zones and when the Greens are demanding the same in their campaign against cars, it is pretty clear where we are headed. If it walks like a duck and quacks like a duck, you can bet Labor will tell you it is a thoroughbred horse.

It is a timely reminder of how this government works when one of the Chief Minister's economic development goals is to give people back time. His strategy waxes lyrical about how important it is to reduce travel time, all while another minister is working to

slow down and increase travel time. We will wait and see. As we have come to expect from Labor, one hand does not know what the other is doing. The taxpayer payer will be lumped with the cost of two completely opposite policies and will get none of the benefits. So, before this new framework progresses any further, maybe the government could sit down and figure out what they want out of this and fit all of the different pieces together. It would make for a refreshing change.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (11.28): I thank Minister Cheyne for the statement and for outlining the new road safety framework. I strongly support the intent of Vision Zero to eliminate all traffic fatalities and serious injuries while ensuring safe, healthy and equitable mobility for all in our community. As the minister noted, every life lost on our roads is one too many and the urgency for continued action is clear.

It is pleasing to see black spot projects funded across the Murrumbidgee electorate, including two along Hindmarsh Drive, a key east-west route that carries significant daily traffic. Tomorrow I will be tabling a petition from residents of O'Malley, calling for safety upgrades at the intersection of Tyagarah Street and Hindmarsh Drive. This is a clear example of a community-identified risk, and I hope it will be considered for a future round of black spot funding.

I would also like to highlight a few safety issues I get many representations on. There is the ongoing issues of safe access to the LDK Amberfield Retirement Village on the Cotter Road. There are serious safety issues with hooning, racing and antisocial behaviour at Uriarra. The C4 Cycleway at Wilbow Street in Woden is dangerous and needs a raised crossing to slow traffic. I again raise the unresolved safety concerns at the school crossing on Hodgson Crescent in Pearce, outside Sacred Heart Primary School. There have been near misses at this location, with vehicles travelling too quickly down the hill to the school crossing. The school community, including the principal, has made repeated requests for one speed cushion to slow the traffic before it reaches the school crossing. This is a simple solution, yet it remains outstanding and urgent—one speed cushion.

I thank the minister for the recent productive meeting with her and her staff where we discussed a range of local road safety issues, including the Sacred Heart crossing. I look forward to further updates on how this issue, one speed cushion, can be resolved.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Legal Affairs—Standing Committee Scrutiny report 19

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

Legal Affairs—Standing Committee (Legislative Scrutiny Role)—Scrutiny Report 19, dated 19 May 2026, together with extracts of the relevant minutes of proceedings—

I seek leave to make a brief statement.

Leave granted.

MS BARRY: Scrutiny report 19 contains the committee's comments on six bills, 10 pieces of subordinate legislation, proposed amendments to one bill and one government response. The committee draws the attention of the Assembly to its comments on the Fuel Legislation Amendment Bill 2026, a bill that was introduced and passed in the last sitting week. The committee invites the responsible minister to respond to the committee's comments on the bill. The report was circulated to members when the Assembly was not sitting. I commend the report to the Assembly.

Environment and Planning—Standing Committee Report 7

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

Environment and Planning—Standing Committee—Report 7—Inquiry into Annual and Financial Reports 2024-25, dated 11 May 2026, together with extracts of the relevant minutes of proceedings—

I move:

That the report be noted.

This is the seventh report of the Standing Committee on Environment and Planning for the Eleventh Assembly. The Assembly referred the inquiry on 21 October 2025. The committee held public hearings on 10, 12, 17 and 18 November 2025. At the hearings, the committee heard from ACT government ministers, directorate officials and statutory officers. Thirty-one questions were taken on notice. The report makes 31 recommendations.

On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank all ministers and statutory officials and directorate staff for their engagement in the inquiry process, and I thank Hansard and broadcasting staff for their work in supporting our committee. I thank my colleagues for their really collegiate and excellent contributions and thank our very hardworking staff, who have a lot of reports to get through and are deeply relieved to have another one out the door.

I commend the report to the Assembly.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Legal Affairs—Standing Committee Report 9

MS BARRY (Ginninderra) (11.33): I present the following report:

Legal Affairs—Standing Committee—Report 9—Inquiry into legislation on proposed firearms reform, dated 15 May 2026, including additional comments (Ms Barry) together with extracts of the relevant minutes of proceedings—

I move:

That the report be noted.

This is the ninth report of the Standing Committee on Legal Affairs for the Eleventh Assembly. This inquiry commenced on 11 February 2025. The committee appreciates the passionate views of those who participated in this inquiry, as it received a substantial amount of evidence, with the committee receiving 88 submissions. The committee makes two findings and 11 recommendations.

On behalf of the committee, I thank all of those people who made submissions to the inquiry and who participated in the public hearing. I thank the other members of the committee, Mr Werner-Gibbings and Mr Rattenbury.

I commend the report to the Assembly.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS (Brindabella) (11.34): I echo the words of the chair about this report. She did note that it was the ninth report that the Standing Committee on Legal Affairs Committee has put out, which is quite some going. A lot of those reports have been on extremely weighty issues, and this one was no different. I will not speak for the chair, but certainly in my experience the amount of engagement that we had on this report—both through submissions and from members of the public coming up to me at street stalls—was unlike any other ones that I have been involved with to date.

We have as a committee done our best to reflect the breadth of views that we received through submissions and personal testimony, and I think we have struck a pretty reasonable balance around both elements of the report that will give the government some really useful pointers towards the work it needs to be doing to improve both the communication of what it is seeking to do with the legislation and the way that it works with stakeholders.

From a very personal perspective, I thank the chair and our erstwhile colleague Mr Rattenbury for the conversations that they had while we were discussing the report's drafting. I learnt a lot from listening to both of them. It was a fascinating experience for me. I am extremely grateful for the work that the secretariat has done. I now look forward to setting the agenda, as there are only two of us on the committee. So we will be very ruthless in what we intend to look at next.

MS BARRY (Ginninderra) (11.36), in reply: First of all I want to thank the secretariat for all the work that they had to do to pull this report together. I echo Mr Werner-Gibbings' comments that this was a really tricky one to not only reach what we hope is a position that is palatable to those members of the community that are interested in this report but also give the government some, I guess, framework to work to. I also note that this was one report that Mr Rattenbury wanted to see as a final act, and so it was really important to him that this report was finalised. Once again, I thank the committee and the secretariat for the huge effort that went into this report.

I wish to say something about my brief comments in the report. As I have noted, there are several findings that I believe that warrant greater consideration. Specifically, the main concern that I identified in my additional comments relate to the proposed

warrantless searches and seizure powers and the use of the “reasonably required” test rather than the “reasonable suspicion” test. There will be more to say about this bill in due course, but what I would say is that the evidence we heard at the committee is that the proposed process is inconsistent with what is obtainable in other jurisdictions and, more importantly, it poses significant risk around the extent to which those issues can be judicially reviewed. While the committee has recommended some safeguards, my concerns could have been alleviated if we knew more about the government proposed safeguards in advance. In my view, I think that that test warrants further sophisticated consideration.

I again commend the report to the Assembly.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Visitors

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: I would like to acknowledge that present in the gallery is a delegation from our twin parliament, Kiribati, led by the Hon. Tekeewa Tarati, Minister for Infrastructure and Sustainable Energy.

Minister and delegate, on behalf of all members of this Assembly, welcome to the ACT Legislative Assembly.

Public Accounts and Administration—Standing Committee Report 7

MR MILLIGAN (Yerrabi) (11.40): I present the following report:

Public Accounts and Administration—Standing Committee—Report 7—Inquiry into Annual and Financial Reports 2024-25, dated 11 May 2026, together with extracts of the relevant minutes of proceedings—

I move:

That the report be noted.

This is the seventh report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts and Administration for the Eleventh Assembly. The committee held public hearings in November 2025. Witnesses answered 32 questions on notice and questions taken on notice. The committee makes 21 recommendations in the report.

On behalf of the committee, I would like to recognise the ACT government directorates for their assistance to the committee. I thank those who contributed to the committee’s inquiry hearing, particularly Hansard, Broadcasting and our committee secretariat. The committee looks forward to the implementation of recommendations.

I commend the report to the Assembly.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (11.41): I rise to speak on this important report, because it goes to the heart of the territory’s fiscal position and whether our current

settings are sustainable over the long-term. What stands out clearly is the scale of the challenge. The ACT has not recorded a cash surplus for many years, and forward estimates do not show a return in the near term. At the same time, debt continues to grow and interest costs are taking up an increasing share of the budget.

The committee also highlights a pattern that should concern us all. In recent years, budgets have consistently over-estimated revenue and under-estimated expenses. The result is that deficits are larger than expected, which makes it harder for government, service providers and the community to plan with confidence. There are also gaps in how expenditure is reported and controlled. The report makes the point that, while there is a broad fiscal strategy, it is not always clear how decisions are made on priorities or how spending is linked to outcomes.

Infrastructure is another key thing. While investment is essential for a growing city, it is also one of the main drivers of debt. The report notes that there is no current whole-of-government infrastructure plan to guide those decisions. In that context, the recommendations are both practical and necessary. They focus on improving transparency, strengthening reporting and requiring clearer measures of fiscal discipline so that the Assembly and the public can better understand how decisions are made and whether they are delivering value.

Ultimately, this report is a reminder that fiscal sustainability is not just an abstract concept; it has real consequences for future budgets, services and generational equity.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Transport and City Services—Standing Committee Report 2

MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi) (11.43): I present the following report:

Transport and City Services—Standing Committee—Report 2—Inquiry into Annual and Financial Reports 2024-25, undated, together with extracts of the relevant minutes of proceedings—

I move:

That the report be noted.

This is the second report of the Standing Committee on Transport and City Services for the Eleventh Assembly. The 2024-25 annual and financial reports were presented in the Assembly on 21 October 2025. Clause 4 of the establishing resolution refers all calendar and financial year annual and financial reports to the relevant standing committee for inquiry and report.

The committee held public hearings on 13, 18 and 19 November 2025. At the hearings, the committee heard from ACT government ministers, directorate officials and statutory authorities. The committee makes four recommendations and 26 questions were taken on notice.

On behalf of the committee, I thank all ministers, statutory officials, directorate officials and other witnesses for their assistance to the committee and their significant contributions to this inquiry. We also thank Hansard and broadcasting staff for their work in supporting the committee. I would like to thank the other members of the committee, Mr Werner-Gibbings, and Mr Braddock, and of course the committee team. The secretariat have done an amazing job pulling this together. We know what a busy time it is; so we are very thankful to them.

I commend the report to the Assembly.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Sitting suspended from 11.45 am to 2.00 pm

Questions without notice

Public housing—debt to commonwealth

MR PARTON: My question is to the Minister for Homes, Homelessness and New Suburbs. Minister, the final report of independent economist Saul Eslake once again highlighted the unreasonable and unfair treatment of the ACT regarding the historic housing debt. Did you or any of your cabinet colleagues formally request forgiveness of the ACT's historic public housing debt to the commonwealth, as part of discussions with your federal Labor colleagues regarding the federal budget?

MS BERRY: I think I have sent a letter, more recently, and I publicly said it at an announcement in Belconnen that included affordable housing with Clare O'Neil standing right next to me. So, I can say I have, absolutely—and over the years sent many letters and had many conversations. Immediately before this budget? I cannot recall. I will double check. But I have, certainly, on every other occasion.

MR PARTON: Minister, did the federal government formally respond to requests and explain why it continues to refuse forgiveness of this debt, or did these calls just fall on deaf ears?

MS BERRY: No, they have responded.

MS BARRY: Minister, will you table all letters and correspondence which request forgiveness of the housing debt, and any federal government response?

MS BERRY: I can do that. I think I might have already done something, but I will do it again.

Canberra Hospital—duress alarms—behavioural assessment unit

MR PARTON: My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, to your knowledge, are the duress alarms in the emergency department at the Canberra Hospital currently functional?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: To my knowledge, the duress alarms are currently functioning, and I have not seen a code that would indicate that that is not the case

today, but it does occasionally occur that duress alarms in various parts of our health system cease functioning. That incurs a code yellow, and work is quickly undertaken to address that. There are business continuity plans in place for when that occurs, and staff well understand those plans and are provided with alternative arrangements.

MR PARTON: Minister, were the duress alarms functional or did they indeed function in the way that they were designed to in the behavioural assessment unit on the day of the siege in April?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Mr Speaker, I would again strongly encourage the Leader of the Opposition to stop referring to this as a siege. That does imply deliberate action on the part of the individual involved, and as I have said multiple times in this place—

Mr Parton: A point of order on relevance—

MR SPEAKER: She has got plenty of time, Mr Parton. I think she is just making a comment, and then I imagine that she is going to turn to the answer.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

As was indicated at the time, a code black was called in relation to this incident, and that process occurred in the way that it is intended to. As far as I am aware, the review—and what I have been advised about this—did not indicate that there was anything that did not occur as it should have in terms of the way staff responded to this incident—

Mr Parton: Did the duress alarms function?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: This is not a matter of duress alarms. This is a matter of calling a code black.

Mr Cocks: A point of order. The question was indeed about duress alarms and their functioning. The minister, if not going to the question of duress alarms, is not answering the question.

MR SPEAKER: Minister?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I will take on notice the question of whether the duress alarms were functional that day. But the key point, Mr Speaker, I think, is that a code black was called in exactly—the staff did everything right in relation to this matter. They responded to an incident of a knife being drawn by removing themselves from danger and calling a code black and eliciting a police response, which was absolutely the right thing to do, and those processes worked as they are supposed to.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, what knowledge do you have of any outages in the duress alarm system since the opening of the new emergency department, and can you provide advice as to how many days the system has not been functional?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Ms Castley for the supplementary. As I indicated in the response to the first question, there are sometimes occasional outages in the duress systems across our facilities. So I will take on notice how many times the duress system

has been—I will review the *Hansard*, because I cannot remember if Ms Castley asked about the entire critical services building, or just the emergency department or just the BAU. I will review the *Hansard* and take that question on notice.

Levies and taxation—gambling revenue

MS CLAY: My question is to the Minister for Gaming Reform. The report from Mr Saul Eslake says that the ACT collects less revenue per head of population from gambling taxes than any other jurisdiction except Western Australia. We raised around \$165 per person less than the national average and we might be missing out on \$60 million or \$80 million in tax each year. Mr Eslake further notes that if the ACT raised more taxes from gambling, there would be no adverse impact on our share of GST revenue. Minister, how much revenue are we missing out on because we tax gambling less than the national average?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question. I will take the question, as Treasurer. Obviously, we note Mr Eslake's final report that he has provided to the Assembly's Select Committee on the Fiscal Sustainability of the ACT. The government will be providing a response to the committee. We will take all of Mr Eslake's suggestions seriously and provide a response to the committee. That will include a response to his suggestion around revenue opportunities, including gambling taxes.

I am not sure that we have the information that you are requesting on hand, but I will take it on notice and see what potentially we could provide; otherwise we will respond more formally in the government's formal response to the committee.

I do note that there is substantial work underway at the moment in relation to reform of gambling, and reform of the club sector. When the government responds to Mr Eslake's report, it will be in that context. Noting that there is a lot of change that is underway, particularly around gaming machines, we will need to take that into account in relation to the pace of reform suggested by Mr Eslake.

MS CLAY: What would be the positive impacts for our community if we raised gambling taxes?

MR STEEL: There could be a range of different effects, and those will need to be considered by the government more fully, in understanding Mr Eslake's suggestions. Of course, we have seen the federal government recently respond to the federal inquiry into the work that they are doing, particularly further work that they are doing at the federal level around taxation settings. There can sometimes be unintended consequences with changes to tax, and we will need to more fully understand those. We will consider what Mr Eslake has put forward. We have not ruled anything out. We will provide a fully considered response back to the Assembly's committee.

MR BRADDOCK: Treasurer, for comparison, how much of the net revenue from gambling is currently returned to the community sector through the mandatory requirements?

MR STEEL: With the review of clubs that has been underway, there are a range of requirements that are already there, particularly for clubs that have gaming machines,

to provide a return to the community. When we are talking about changes to gambling taxes more broadly, and gaming machine revenue, we would need to think about the broader settings that apply. I am happy to take that question on notice. I want to flag that there are a range of different, complex, moving parts that government needs to properly consider, as we continue to work through recommendations from the review that has been underway. I look forward to working with Dr Paterson on that.

Canberra Institute of Technology—executive salaries

MR EMERSON: My question is to the Minister for Skills, Training and Industrial Relations. The former CEO of the CIT Leanne Cover collected an estimated \$1.2 million in total remuneration, having been stood down on two years of paid leave while she was being investigated for serious corrupt conduct. We have heard a lot about the CIT's financial struggles which have been used to justify rising course costs, including a threefold increase in fees for some programs, such as the Diploma of Remedial Massage, and the discontinuation of a languages program for years 11 and 12 students that only cost \$124,000 to run. Given these financial difficulties and having just recruited a new CEO on a salary package of over \$440,000, Minister, why in February this year did the CIT seek to recruit a new deputy CEO, also on a salary package of over \$400,000 per year? And did the board consult you about this?

MR PETTERSSON: I thank Mr Emerson for the question. As members in this place would know, and it has been called for in a range of new recommendations, the CIT has in recent times been seeking to restructure the executive at the CIT. That has led to a change in personnel and the creation of some new positions. I would have to check my records as to whether I was officially informed in correspondence from the board. I was, however, aware of the creation of that new position. That recruitment process, as I am aware, has been going well.

Regarding some of the suggestions Mr Emerson has made, I would not necessarily link them directly. The CIT has been experiencing a range of cost pressures in recent years, whilst also experiencing a decline in enrolments. The CIT, as an institution, is not able to nimbly respond to some of those pressures, due to its enterprise agreement and the structure of the CIT as a government entity. So, whilst I appreciate that the CIT has been experiencing some challenges, I do not think all of these events are as connected as Mr Emerson would like.

MR EMERSON: Minister, are you aware that earlier this month some 40 CIT executives were flown to the TAFE Directors Australia Convention in Brisbane? And does the government consider that to be an appropriate use of taxpayer money?

MR PETTERSSON: I thank Mr Emerson for the question. I was not aware of that conference and I did not receive an invitation.

Mr Parton: A mad invite, hey?

MR PETTERSSON: It sounds like a heck of a party, Mr Parton. Day-to-day operational decisions for the CIT are the responsibility of the CIT board, as well as the CEO. I am happy to take on notice further information and potential justification for expenditure of that nature on behalf of the member.

MS LEE: Minister, does your government support this level of executive-level staffing expenditure at the CIT, noting that the 2025 annual report shows that the CIT's average staffing level exceeded its budget by \$3.2 million?

MR PETTERSSON: Mr Speaker, could Ms Lee repeat the question?

MR SPEAKER: Ms Lee, could you repeat the question, please?

MS LEE: Minister, does your government support this level of executive-level staffing expenditure at the CIT, noting that the 2025 annual report shows that the CIT's average staffing level exceeded its budget by \$3.2 million?

MR PETTERSSON: I thank Ms Lee for the question. As I alluded to in my first answer, there was a range of changes to executive staffing at the CIT, seeking to reduce the size of the executive.

Health—performance

MR PARTON: My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, the final report on the ACT's fiscal sustainability confirmed that health spending is the single-largest driver of the ACT's structural budget pressure, while outcomes are consistently falling when compared to other jurisdictions—not to mention that morale and culture are at record lows, occupational violence is rampant and the ACT is one of worst performers in delivering elective surgery within the recommended wait time. Minister, how does this Labor government justify continued runaway spending without clear evidence of improved systems or any improvement in outcomes?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mr Parton for the question but I do not think he characterised Mr Eslake's report and its commentary about health correctly. Indeed, what we have seen in the health system over recent years is that our emergency department has significantly improved, to become the best emergency department performance among all of the smaller jurisdictions, and our culture and morale have significantly improved, according to the independent surveys that we get done on a regular basis. We have seen an ongoing improvement in relation to that, and anecdotal feedback supports that as well, not only from our staff but also from patients, who regularly come and see me at mobile offices and say that they not only got excellent treatment from our world-class hospitals but also were impressed by how happy the staff seemed in providing that treatment and, although they are working hard, seemed to be working collegiately together.

We are seeing an improvement in elective surgery performance and a reduction in waiting lists in that regard. We obviously had some disruption during COVID 19, but Canberra Health Services has delivered years record elective surgery growth over three of the last four years. This year we are on track to deliver around 17,500 elective surgeries and to deliver our election commitment of 70,000 elective surgeries over four years—the same level of commitment that the Canberra Liberals made in the last election. So none of the pieces of information that Mr Parton included in his question actually stand up to scrutiny. I would suggest that I do not think he has characterised Mr Eslake's commentary accurately in asking his question.

MR PARTON: Minister, can you identify for the Assembly any specific health programs or administrative areas that are currently under review for efficiency savings?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: In the 2025-26 budget we included \$13 million to support efficiency measures right across our health service. An example I can provide to the Assembly and Mr Parton—as I have done on numerous occasions—is in our outpatient services. In planned care, which covers elective surgery and outpatients, the introduction of the integrated operations centre has provided greater visibility of our waiting lists. The work that is currently underway is about ensuring that there is more consistency in the way that waiting lists are managed, an increase in the number of first appointments that people are able to access, by ensuring that those patients who are stable are able to be referred back to their general practitioner for ongoing support, so that more people can get their first appointment as an outpatient, recognising that about 180,000—I think that was the last number I saw—outpatient appointments are delivered every year by Canberra Health Services. So it is a very big operation that we are talking about here.

That is just one example of increased efficiencies in our health service—ensuring that there is more consistency in the way that our services are delivered, to get through a larger number of patients and support our teams in doing that through workload reduction as well.

MR COCKS: Minister, are Canberra taxpayers receiving better value for money on health expenditure compared to other jurisdictions of a similar size and what comparative cost and outcome data have used to form that view?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: We know that historically the ACT has been a relatively high-cost jurisdiction. When we look at the National Efficient Price and the cost of delivering a National Weighted Activity Unit of health activity, we are seeing that cost coming down as we have seen those efficiencies flow through the system from things like the integrated operations centre. But we do have more work to do, and I have been very upfront about that.

We also have relatively well-paid staff—and I recognise that we are currently in an enterprise bargaining process. Many of our doctors, nurses and midwives are well paid compared to those in other jurisdictions. That reflects the fact that we are a high-wage jurisdiction more generally. That was something that was reflected in Mr Eslake's report when he commented on the socio-economic make-up of the ACT households and community. As we have talked about multiple times, we also face challenges in terms of economies of scale, which do make it hard for us to deliver health services—

Mr Cocks: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: the question was very clearly about the costs compared with other jurisdictions of similar size and value for money, specifically.

MR SPEAKER: I think the minister did go to that. She has been giving explanations saying that the costs are higher and the reason is that we have a higher wage base and people get paid more. She then explained that there is an attempt to bring those costs down. So, whether you agree with her or not, I think she has been relevant, Mr Cocks.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Thank you. The one thing I would add—I did miss the part of the question about compared with small jurisdictions—is that the Independent Health and Aged Care Pricing Authority is currently undertaking a piece of work that the ACT drove to better understand the cost base of small jurisdictions.

Health—New South Wales residents

MR PARTON: My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, the Eslake report highlights that the ACT health system continues to absorb significant costs associated with treating New South Wales residents while the financial compensation arrangements fail to cover the full cost of care. Minister, given the report noted that more than 20 per cent of services delivered by ACT hospitals are provided to New South Wales residents, how much did this funding gap cost the ACT taxpayer in the last financial year?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Thank you to the Leader of the Opposition for the question. I will take the question on notice in terms of the exact gap, but what we do know is that New South Wales pays us at the National Efficient Price, which in 2024-25 was \$6,465 per national weighted activity unit. In that year, the ACT did have a particularly high estimated price of \$8,370, or 29 per cent higher than the National Efficient Price. Now, that is coming down, as I mentioned earlier, and that was an unusual year in relation to the calculation of the ACT price.

We have moved towards activity based funding, which is another efficiency measure we have taken to help us to better understand the cost of delivering services to ensure that is transparent to the clinicians who deliver those services. Clinicians are by nature competitive, so when they can see the data and the information more transparently, that will help us to engage them in the process of increased efficiency.

I can also say, in relation to our relationship with New South Wales, that the most recent cross-border agreement that I negotiated with the former health minister, Mr Hazzard, was a significant improvement. Previously there was a cap on the growth in activity that New South Wales would fund. We got them to remove that cap on growth so that now at least they fund all of the activity that we deliver for New South Wales patients at the National Efficient Price. But they do not contribute to capital expenditure, which is a point that Mr Eslake has made. We have delivered a \$660 million Canberra hospital expansion and we are investing in a new Northside Hospital, and, under current arrangements, New South Wales will not contribute anything towards those billions of dollars of capital that we are spending on new hospital infrastructure. We will keep making that argument.

MR PARTON: Minister, can you detail the formal representations that you or the Chief Minister have made to your New South Wales counterparts so that the ACT is reimbursed fairly for the cost of treating New South Wales residents?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: As I indicated in my answer to the previous question, in working with the former New South Wales health minister we did renegotiate a new cross-border agreement which was significantly better for the ACT than the previous agreement. As a result of that, we will see increased funding flowing to the ACT budget

from back payments for previous years, as that has worked through the system. So that agreement will make a significant contribution to our budget bottom line for this year and for next year, and that is really, really important.

Now that we have landed the National Health Reform Agreement, we are in the process of working through a renewed New South Wales-ACT cross-border health agreement. Our officials are having those conversations. I have engaged informally with the current New South Wales health minister about that, and I will be engaging more formally with him, but we needed to await the outcome of the National Health Reform Agreement before we undertook those. So we extended the New South Wales ACT agreement for a year.

In addition, why we are so keen to ensure that the Independent Health and Aged Care Pricing Authority does the work so that we can get the small jurisdiction multiplier for the National Efficient Price into the National Health Reform Agreement is because, at the moment, we have an additional \$75 million this year, and expected next year, from the commonwealth government. That \$75 million recognises the impact of small jurisdiction costs and lack of economies of scale, but we do not get the same funding flowing from New South Wales. If that feeds into the National Efficient Price, it means New South Wales will also pay us that multiplier, and that is why we have had incredibly strong advocacy from the ACT, from the Chief Minister, from the Treasurer, from myself and from our officials, to have that process take place.

MS LEE: Minister, noting your answer, why, despite having been in government for over 20 years, have negotiations failed to secure, at least at a minimum, the cost associated with treating a New South Wales resident in the ACT?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I will refer Ms Lee to my previous answers and all of the work we have done and the significant improvements that we have achieved over the last few years.

Transport—roads and active travel

MR BRADDOCK: My question is to the Treasurer.

Treasurer, I refer you to the report by Mr Saul Eslake on the fiscal sustainability of the ACT's finances, which in chart 48 on page 68 shows in the expense category of roads, the Commonwealth Grants Commission's estimated "level of service" provision ratio was 120.9 per cent in 2024-25. Noting that Mr Eslake's report says we appear to spend more on roads than the Grants Commission assesses that we need, and less on public and active transport, why are we not spending more on transport?

MS CHEYNE: Certainly, I can explain why we spend so much on roads: it is due to the design decisions that were taken with our city. It is due to the Y-plan. It is due to the fact that we have satellite towns. It is due to the fact that our roads were built wider, that they were built to a national standard and that there are distinct satellite cities—as you may appreciate, Mr Speaker, and which we all represent—it is quite a distance to travel between some of those. Those were deliberate decisions that were made to a particular standard at the time, and that costs the ACT government an awful lot of

money to maintain.

MR BRADDOCK: Treasurer, how much is the government currently projected to have spent on road maintenance by the end of the current financial year? And how does this compare to its expenditure on path maintenance for the active travel network?

MS CHEYNE: I will take it on notice, Mr Speaker. We get asked this question relatively regularly, and it is usually published in our annual reports. But let me see if we have got anything to update from the most recent response that I would have given.

MS CLAY: Minister, has the ACT really got bigger road distances to travel than other states which have much larger geographic areas to cover?

MS CHEYNE: For the size of our city, yes.

Public schools—New South Wales residents

MS LEE: My question is to the Minister for Education. Minister, the Eslake report highlights that ACT schools are educating a significant number of students from New South Wales, yet there is no equivalent cost recovery or compensation mechanism for these cross-border students. Minister, why is the government funding the education of out-of-jurisdiction students without securing appropriate contributions from New South Wales?

MS BERRY: I thank Ms Lee for her question, and I would say that this is an historical arrangement that the ACT government has had, with New South Wales students getting a public education in ACT public schools. We still get funding under the school resourcing standard for these students to be educated in our schools, and we do provide pathway schools for New South Wales students so that they have a school that is their “priority enrolment area” school, if you like—for New South Wales schools—because we are part of a region of towns, with the ACT being the primary education provider in this region. Although I would note that New South Wales has now started to build more schools across areas where there were no schools previously, areas such as Yass and Murrumbateman, and of course we are seeing schools in Jerrabomberra and Googong as well.

MS LEE: Minister, have you quantified the impact this has on resources available for ACT students, including class sizes, staffing and program funding? If so, will you table that information?

MS BERRY: Well, schools are funded on a per student basis. So I am not sure that the quantifying of funding that Ms Lee is talking about could be done on students that are already funded on a per student funded basis.

MRS MORRIS: Minister, have you ever picked up the phone or made any approach at all to your New South Wales Labor counterpart to negotiate reimbursement or funding contributions from the New South Wales government?

MS BERRY: No, I have not, but I am happy to work with the New South Wales government if that would be appropriate. Although, I would note that I do not believe

that there are any other jurisdictions that provide funding to cross-border enrolments, so it would be unique.

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr Barr: The GST is adjusted to reflect this—

Mr Parton: And you're only a new government! Like, settle in and then maybe work out what to do.

MR SPEAKER: Just ignore him, minister.

Mr Parton interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Mr Parton!

MS BERRY: He loves the attention, Mr Speaker.

The GST is meant to balance out all of those arrangements across jurisdictions. So it would be unique if the ACT were to step into that space. However, I am happy to have those conversations if the New South Wales government would be wanting to do that.

Alexander Maconochie Centre—performance

MRS MORRIS: My question is to the Minister for Corrections. The ACT spends \$805 per prisoner per day, far more than the average Australian expenditure of \$436, yet the government's own AMC master plan says that the current situation at the prison does not support reduced reoffending, and that almost 75 per cent of ACT detainees have previously been incarcerated. Minister, why are Canberrans paying the highest prison costs in the country for a prison system that the government itself says is not properly supporting rehabilitation?

DR PATERSON: Can I ask the member to repeat the question? I am not quite sure what she was asking.

MRS MORRIS: Sure. The ACT spends \$805 per prisoner per day, which is far more than the average Australian expenditure of \$436, yet the government's own master plan for the AMC says that the current situation at the prison does not support reduced reoffending, and that almost 75 per cent of ACT detainees have previously been incarcerated. Minister, why are Canberrans paying the highest prison costs in the country for a prison system that the government itself says is not properly supporting rehabilitation?

DR PATERSON: I will take the facts in that question, Mrs Morris's data, on notice, because I would like to fact-check some of that. It does not sound quite right. I also think it is a whole lot of data that is taken from different sources. I will take on notice and report back to the Assembly on the recidivism rate in the ACT, as well as the cost per day for a detainee.

Mr Cocks: A point of order, Mr Speaker. Under section 118AA, I am not convinced

that the minister, in taking the data on notice, is actually attempting to answer the question, which is: why are Canberrans paying the highest prison costs in the country for a prison system that the government itself says is not properly supporting rehabilitation?

MR SPEAKER: I think the fact that she has taken it on notice—

Mr Cocks: She has taken the data on notice, Mr Speaker.

DR PATERSON: I will take the question on notice.

MR SPEAKER: I think she has taken the question on notice. We will wait and see what comes back on notice, and look at it then, Mr Cocks, and litigate the issue further. By virtue of the fact that she has taken it on notice, that is probably what you get from 118AA, anyway. So we will await that answer.

MRS MORRIS: Minister, have you taken any steps to reduce the ACT's most expensive per prisoner cost at the AMC since you became the minister in 2024?

DR PATERSON: Absolutely. We are significantly invested in supporting our ACT correctional services to support detainees, so that we reduce recidivism in the ACT. There has been a whole range of investments in programs, educational offerings and supports for detainees within the AMC over the last couple of years. We have established a detainee reintegration and education board, which is going through a procurement process to see that there are a whole range of other programs and educational opportunities for our detainees. We have the Confiscated Assets Trust funding, which has now been put towards a work release program, as well as literacy and numeracy education and testing for detainees. We have CIT coming into the AMC, which is a really significant achievement, and we hope to keep working with our partners at CIT to see this continue.

We are also heavily invested in supports and housing programs for people when they are released from prison. We recently attended a justice reform initiative roundtable looking at post-custody employment opportunities for detainees. We will continue to have those discussions in terms of how we can make it easier to support people post release in employment and in getting their lives back on track.

MS BARRY: Minister, isn't the AMC exactly the kind of policy-driven fiscal failure that Mr Eslake has warned about?

DR PATERSON: I did not read Mr Eslake's recommendation on the prison. We have a prison system and, like every other jurisdiction, it is a costly system, and that is why we are focused on reducing recidivism and reducing the crime in our community. We have seen a year-on-year reduction in crime over a long period of time now, and we will continue to work with ACT Policing to see that continue.

Teachers—enterprise bargaining

MISS NUTTALL: My question is to the Minister for the Public Service. Minister, last Friday, AEU members went on their first strike in 15 years and stopped work for two

hours that morning. You would have appreciated the sea of red when thousands educators showed up and not only filled the entire Ainslie Football Club but overflowed onto the oval and marched to the ABC radio station in droves. They are frustrated because, 10 months later, the government has not responded to their log of claims for educators and school assistants. Why haven't management representatives responded to all of the AEU's claims?

MS BERRY: I will take that question. I am the Minister for Education and Early Childhood and am responsible for the enterprise agreement. I understand that the Education Union and their members are frustrated with the process taking so long, and so they have voted to take industrial action, and very successful industrial action. The union should be proud and the members should be proud of the turnout that they achieved for that work. What I can say is that the Education Union and the directorate are meeting frequently. I have already directed the Education Directorate to meet with the Education Union as frequently as possible, with as much clarity around the claims that the Education Union is seeking on behalf of its members. I am meeting with the Education Union at least once a week, but my office and I have been in contact with them almost every day, if not every day, following the industrial action. We are all absolutely focused on getting the best possible outcome. Negotiations take some time. It is a complex matter, although I appreciate the frustrations that the Education Union and its members are facing right now. But our focus and the Education Directorate's focus is to try to get the fairest outcome we can, so I hope to continue those negotiations with the union.

MISS NUTTALL: Minister, how much more would it cost to support the AEU's full log of claims across teaching staff and school assistants?

MS BERRY: I could not even quantify that amount. It would be significant. However, that does not mean that the government just says no to those kinds of negotiations. As Miss Nuttall has suggested, there are a number of claims. They are complex. Some of them would require significant investment that would be beyond the ACT government's ability to fund in any case, but certainly not with the budget in the situation that it is right now. The Education Directorate is continuing to work with the union to understand their needs and the requests from their members and is working through those in detail. That is taking some time.

MS CLAY: Why has the government only provisioned for a three per cent pay increase, which is below inflation?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I will answer as the Minister for the Public Service. In relation to the broader enterprise bargaining process and the way that enterprise bargaining works in the ACT, we have a core and then we have 18 agreements that have different stream negotiations, of which 17 are currently under negotiation. The three per cent per annum pay rise over the next three years was offered as part of the core process, so it is right across the ACT public service, and that includes the teaching and learning support workforce. In fact, it is projected by federal Treasury and the Reserve Bank that inflation will return to the expected rate of 2½ per cent over the next three years. Should that occur, it will in fact be an above-inflation rate of pay increase over the next three years, which is the period of the enterprise agreement.

Obviously, we recognise that people have been facing cost-of-living challenges as a result of inflation in the post-COVID period over the last few years. That has also had an impact on the ACT budget, as Ms Clay is well aware, as chair of the fiscal sustainability committee. We are in challenging fiscal circumstances. The pay offer that we have made is the best that we believe we can do in the current fiscal circumstances of the ACT government, but we recognise that we need to make a pay offer for our very important public service staff right across the ACT public service, including our teachers and learning support staff.

Transport Canberra—bus drivers

MR COCKS: My question is to the Minister for Transport. Minister, prior to the 2024 election, Labor promised Canberrans the world to achieve re-election. One of the many promises made by your party was to hire 350 new drivers to support an expanded bus network. With transport funding declining, have you also abandoned this promise specifically to increase the number of drivers by 350?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question, but I reject the premise of the question. We did not promise the world at the 2024 election. The Chief Minister was very clear about that. That was in contrast to the opposition, who of course continued their “magic pudding” economics that has been smashed by Saul Eslake’s report—the idea that somehow you can spend more and tax less.

Mr Cocks: Point of order, Mr Speaker. While I would like to just reject the premise of the minister’s answer, what I would actually like to do is to raise a concern that the minister is in fact debating the question once again.

MR SPEAKER: I would just make the point, Mr Cocks, that, if you are going to be a bit smart in your questioning, you can expect a smart answer.

Members interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: I call the minister to order—

Mr Barr: You just got a scowl, Mr Speaker!

MR SPEAKER: That would be unparliamentary, and I am sure it would not happen. Anyway, on the point of order, Minister, I would ask you to be directly relevant and to not debate the question.

MR STEEL: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Of course, we are continuing to work on delivering our election commitments that we made for the term. We are coming up to halfway through the term, and we have gone through one budget thus far and we will have another one that I will hand down in June, where we will continue to make progress across a range of different election commitments.

Work is being undertaken by Transport Canberra to continue to recruit a driver workforce, which currently includes over 1,000 employees, including 848 permanent full-time and permanent part-time drivers and 242 casual employees. Since 1 January 2026, we have already had 25 drivers graduate through our training programs. Transport

Canberra continues to run courses, commencing every two weeks, with up to eight trainees on each course. Two recruitment campaigns were held in 2025.

MR COCKS: Mr Speaker, I will try again. Minister, are you walking away from your promise to recruit 350 new drivers while the transport budget falls because your budget is in a bad position?

MR STEEL: No, we are continuing to work on our election commitments across the board, including for transport. Work continues to recruit more drivers, and we have undertaken a range of different training courses, with two recruitment campaigns that were held in 2025—in March and September. The latest campaign, in September, received 557 applications. We have a “come and try day” coming up, where you can go along and try out driving a bus around the training course—an opportunity for people to get a hands-on experience and join the ranks of Transport Canberra to deliver the services that our community needs.

As we continue to work on delivering our election commitments through the budgets, that will include consideration of the driver workforce that we need to be able to deliver on the other range of commitments we made under Labor’s transport plan to deliver more services to the community. We invested in 30 new buses in the last budget and we are going through a procurement process that is underway at the moment for those. Of course, we will also need more drivers to deliver on those commitments. We have a strong pipeline of training underway to be able to deliver those, and there is strong interest in the community in driving for Transport Canberra.

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, how are you going to pay for these commitments?

MR STEEL: We will outline in every budget how we are paying for the range of different election commitments that we have made and delivered on. We have made very good progress against our election commitments across the board—not all of which required funding. Some of those commitments were to introduce legislation, undertake reviews and do a range of other policy work. Some of those did have funding attached, and those will be considered in every budget. I look forward to updating the community when I release the budget in June on how we are progressing against funding those election commitments.

Fuel security

MS TOUGH: My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, following yesterday’s national cabinet meeting, can you update the Assembly on the outcomes for fuel security and what they mean for the ACT?

MR BARR: I thank Ms Tough for the question. Yes, national cabinet met yesterday and heard some encouraging news in relation to national fuel security. We confirm that Australia remains at level 2 of our National Fuel Security Plan. That means supply is continuing at a steady rate, but there is still some pressure and uncertainty in the medium term.

We heard that national fuel reserves are in fact higher now than they were at the start of the war. We now have around 43 days of petrol, 38 days of diesel and 31 days of jet

fuel and the equivalent in storage in Australia, and a large number of ships waiting, in fact, to offload their cargo once more storage becomes available. We are also advised that panic buying appears now to have stopped, which is improving supply reliability across jurisdictions, including also here in the ACT. This, of course, is a serious matter for this territory and this nation and our economy. So the efforts of governments at national, state and territory levels to provide confidence in fuel supply into the future have been important in seeing that panic buying ease and now apparently stop.

MS TOUGH: Chief Minister, how do these national developments translate to fuel supply conditions in Canberra?

MR BARR: I thank Ms Tough for the supplementary. The improved national outlook certainly reinforces that our local fuel supply remains reliable. Any isolated outages of a particular fuel type are resolved quickly as new deliveries arrive. We continue to closely monitor supply using the new legislative powers that require real time data on fuel stocks and deliveries, and this certainly will ensure that we can respond quickly if conditions change in the future.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Chief Minister, what role has the change in consumer behaviour played, and how prepared is the ACT if conditions worsen?

MR BARR: Look, I think it has been really important that panic buying has stopped. We see this cycle. We saw it with toilet paper during the pandemic and we saw it with fuel hoarding at the beginning of this crisis. It really does have an impact. So if people continue to purchase only what they need, we do reduce pressure on local supply chains and we help maintain steady availability of fuel. This is absolutely critical for diesel dependent industries. So much of what flows into our jurisdiction in terms of fuel, food and the transportation of goods is powered by diesel. That is why there has been a particular focus at the national level on building diesel supplies.

At the same time, though, we need to be well prepared and we have seen a particular response from a segment of the market, particularly those transitioning away from petrol vehicles to electric vehicles, that has reduced demand somewhat. The ACT has the strongest take up of electric vehicles in the country, by a factor of nearly threefold.

We are also well prepared for any future changes with the strength and transparency laws—and I thank this place and Minister Orr for the work to achieve that—and our alignment with the National Fuel Security Plan that ensures we can act quickly, including supporting any future national measures if they are required.

National cabinet will meet again in about three weeks time. This is a rolling program of assessing new fuel supplies and, of course, hoping that there is a breakthrough in the negotiations between the United States and Iran.

Weston Creek Bowling Club—closure

MS CARRICK: My question is to the minister for planning. The impending closure of the Weston Creek Bowling Club threatens the loss of a critical community asset which supports social connection, recreation and wellbeing. It also represents a missed opportunity to transform the site into a broader community and seniors precinct,

delivering preventative health benefits, supporting aging-in-place and strengthening community cohesion. Minister, can you confirm whether the Labor Club has sought to deconcessionalise the lease? And will the government rule out any changes that would undermine the site's long-term use as a community facility?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question. Certainly, I acknowledge the current situation with the Weston Creek Bowling Club. I have met with the bowling club to talk through the matter, and I understand the concern of members in relation to ongoing access to recreation facilities for their bowlers.

I know that there was a decision made by the Labor Club to close the club at Weston Creek, and there has been discussion between the bowling club and the Labor Club about that, to help inform them to make their future decisions. That is a matter between the lessee and the bowling club.

The discussion that I was having with the bowling club was about whether there would be opportunities on other sites around the area and particularly in Weston Creek, where they could continue their activities. There also has been some interest from other bowling clubs, who have been engaged in discussions with those parties as well.

I will come back on notice in relation to the concessional arrangements on the lease. It was my understanding that the lease was already deconcessionalised some time ago, and, because deconcessionalisation was already undertaken some time ago, I have not received any representations about deconcessionalisation.

That, of course, does not preclude community uses being undertaken on the site. That really depends on future decisions by the lessee as to what they would like to do on the site, or whether they are prepared to sell it to someone else—whether it is a bowling club or another lessee—to be able to undertake further activities on site. It is zoned as CZ6, so it is a commercial zone.

MS CARRICK: Minister, will you progress a clear precinct plan to retain the purpose of the Weston Creek Bowling Club and the Labor Club precinct as a community and seniors hub?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question. Certainly, those uses are not necessarily precluded—although aged care, I understand, is not permitted under CZ6, under the current zoning.

The government is not currently proposing a major plan amendment in relation to rezoning the site to allow for uses that are currently not permitted.

We have a further piece of work that is being undertaken looking at some of the CZ6 sites around Canberra associated with the clubs, and that is aimed at supporting clubs to diversify their revenue streams. This site may potentially form part of that, but I do not think it is going to be a specific priority.

You might recall that Labor went to the election making a very specific commitment that we would consider looking at residential or aged care and retirement living uses within the CZ6 zone. But that came with a caveat and that caveat was that we wanted

to see no net loss of community and recreational facilities as part of that process. So, the government is undertaking policy work looking at the zone at the moment, but we are not doing just a precinct-level analysis of this one site. We are looking at a range of different sites across Canberra. We do want to see, where possible, those club facilities maintained and then also community and recreational facilities there.

Now, unfortunately in this case, the site has been deconcessionalised some time ago. It is a market lease. It has certain requirements and permitted land-uses under the zoning, and the government is not currently proposing to change that—although there is further work happening in relation to broader clubs' diversification, and on which I will update the Assembly and community.

MISS NUTTALL: Minister, do you have a timeframe for any of this work that you are undertaking?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question. We will be undertaking a lot of this work over the next year. I will provide timelines to the Assembly once I am able.

Budget—election commitments

MR COCKS: My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, independent economist Saul Eslake's review of the fiscal sustainability of the ACT was highly critical of the unreliability of the government's forward estimates, echoing many others, including the former Auditor-General, and last year's estimates committee report and many other public commentators. Will this year's budget finally include the full cost of all ACT Labor election commitments?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. We acknowledge Mr Eslake's report, and we will be responding to that. We have a lot of confidence in Treasury officials and the work that they do in forecasting the ACT's budget numbers. But in each budget, the ACT government makes policy decisions, and there was a lot of discussion by Mr Eslake about policy decisions—policy decisions that we have taken to support our community during COVID-19 and policy decisions that we are undertaking to support our community now, as our community faces cost-of-living pressure. We will continue to make policy decisions in every budget, and the budget will be adjusted accordingly, based on those decisions. That is what we report on when I hand down the appropriation bill—the amount of extra appropriation that is required to deliver both new policy decisions and the existing funding that is baseline funding that is required for agencies to deliver the services and infrastructure that our community needs.

So, yes, we will continue to look at making policy decisions; that is exactly what a budget is about. And we will prioritise frontline services. We will be responsive to the community, but we will also be responsible in terms of the way that we manage the budget, and we will be taking seriously the suggestions by Mr Eslake.

And unlike the Liberals, we will not be ruling anything out. This is a report that they brought to the Assembly and commissioned through the select committee, and they are the ones that are ruling out the recommendations by Mr Eslake to put the budget on a more sustainable path. We will not. We will take this seriously and responsibly.

MR SPEAKER: Minister, the Liberal Party's position is not relevant to your jurisdictional area. I would ask that you be relevant. Thank you, Minister.

Mr Cocks: A point of order under 118AA, the question, in fact, was: will this year's budget include the full cost of all ACT Labor election commitments? While the Treasurer spoke to a range of things that they think about, there was no discussion of whether the budget will include those election commitments.

MR SPEAKER: On the point of order, Minister?

MR STEEL: I talked about policy decisions. That is exactly what our ACT Labor election commitments are.

MR SPEAKER: He might not have been explicit, but he certainly was relevant and he was responsive, in my view.

MR COCKS: Treasurer, will this year's budget include and identify the full cost of public service pay rises?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. It will reflect any decisions that have been made in relation to public sector pay rises.

MRS MORRIS: Treasurer, how will you pay for additional spending—bigger cuts and more debt, or higher fees and taxes?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question. Every budget we look to deliver responsibly the commitments that we made to the community at the election, responding to their needs and the demand that we are seeing in the community. I did that yesterday with community service organisations, particularly in the housing and homelessness sector—responding to their needs. We will also outline in the budget how that is paid for over time.

What we will not be doing is making massive cuts to the public service and the services that Canberrans rely on. That would not be appropriate or responsible at this particular point in time in the context of a war that has put pressure on households and our community.

What we will also do is continue the work that we set out in the budget last year to support the territory's sound public finances, based on our updated fiscal strategy. I acknowledge Mr Eslake has made some suggestions around improvements to the fiscal strategy, and we will consider those seriously. But we will show progress against our commitment to support economic growth and employment, returning the budget to operating cash surpluses over the forward estimates period—a path to returning the headline net operating balance to surplus over the forward estimates period, ensuring net debt is at sustainable levels over time.

Levies and taxation—income tax

MR PARTON: My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, your New South Wales Labor colleague Chris Minns has warned that bracket creep is eating away at the

pay rises of nurses, teachers, police and other workers. You have praised Labor's federal budget as delivering cost-of-living relief. Is Premier Minns wrong, or are Canberra workers also being hit by bracket creep while your government increases rates, fees and charges?

MR BARR: I thought the New South Wales Premier's comments in relation to how many days in the week he worked, either notionally, as he put it, for the government or for himself, was a slight misunderstanding of how a progressive tax system operates. You do not pay the highest tax rate on the entirety of your income. You only pay the tax rate above the threshold in each tax category—

Mr Parton: Have you counselled Mr Minns on this?

MR BARR: I do not need to provide running commentary on every comment of every other first minister in the country.

Mr Parton: I thought they'd appreciate it!

MR BARR: I do not know that they would, Mr Parton, and I do not think it is my role to provide running commentary! But you have asked me a question in question time, so I am responding to it, consistent with the questions I got from the *Canberra Times* and responded to, so I would refer you to that article, which outlined my views. I think the *Canberra Times* journalist did faithfully reproduce my quotes. I wasn't so wild about the headline, but you can't always get what you want with the media.

MR PARTON: Chief Minister, is it not the case that while you praise federal tax relief, your own government keeps taking more from Canberra households through higher rates, fees and charges?

MR BARR: I would refer you to the Eslake report, which in fact probably says something slightly different in that regard.

Mr Parton: So you are lowering fees and charges?

MR BARR: The Eslake report is quite clear that, compared to other jurisdictions, the ACT is not a high-taxing jurisdiction, and he does, of course, provide some suggestions in his report that, as the Treasurer said, the government will need to consider over time. I do note, of course, that you have already expressed your opposition to a number of those elements, through interviews on ABC Radio, with the breakfast announcer who is sitting in the gallery now.

Mr Parton: A point of order, Mr Speaker, on relevance. The question is specifically about whether they are increasing rates, fees and charges here in the ACT. It does not go to any comparison with other jurisdictions.

MR SPEAKER: Do you have anything to add, Chief Minister?

MR BARR: In the history of every government everywhere in the world in every jurisdiction, there does tend to be an increase in revenue every year, reflecting growing populations and growing economies. I do not think that the ACT is any different there.

We, of course, seek to maintain the lowest possible tax base necessary to provide services to this community. But the demand for services continues to grow and revenue does need to be part of the solution.

MRS MORRIS: Chief Minister, why are you so quick to highlight your good relationship with the federal Labor government when it results in Canberrans getting a very raw deal?

MR BARR: I do not believe it does result in Canberrans getting a raw deal. For those who have been calling for some time for changes to Australia's taxation arrangements as they impact particularly on housing affordability, this budget does provide hope and opportunity for those who aspire to home ownership. That is something that should not just be for some; it should be for more. That is certainly what this budget delivers at a federal level, as well as a recognition—and this is particularly important for Canberra, because most of the income earned in this city is earned through work. We have the highest level of workforce participation. People in Canberra earn their incomes principally through their labour.

We are a working city—the most productive working city in the nation. Having a commonwealth government recognise that through a further series of tax cuts on earned income is a really important structural change in our taxation system. The combination of the measures within this budget do seek to address intergenerational equity when it comes to the housing market and do seek to reward those who work to earn their income. That is an important change in our tax system.

Domestic, family and sexual violence services—government support

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: My question is to the Minister for the Prevention of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence. Minister, domestic, family and sexual violence remains a serious national issue. Can you update the Assembly on your announcement last week which committed to deliver sustainable support to frontline services?

DR PATERSON: I thank the member for the question. Domestic, family and sexual violence is an ongoing national epidemic. It is a shared priority across governments across this country, and the ACT government recognises the really important role that we play in leading the community to address this violence. That is why, as part of the 2026-27 ACT budget, we are investing \$44 million over four years to strengthen our frontline services and provide long-term funding. This funding represents sustainable, tailored support for people affected by domestic, family and sexual violence.

Key investments include: \$18.5 million to provide sustainable ongoing funding for core domestic, family and sexual violence response services, including the Domestic Violence Crisis Service, the Canberra Rape Crisis Centre and the YWCA; \$2.9 million to boost frontline funding for critical services to help meet growing demand; \$6.7 million for behaviour change programs, including funding for EveryMan and Room4Change; \$4.1 million to continue programs supporting children and young people as victims in their own right; \$2.09 million to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victims of sexual violence via direct funding to Aboriginal community controlled organisations; and funding to provide tailored supports for the multicultural community, LGBTIQ+ Canberrans and people experiencing financial abuse.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Minister, how will this funding allow these crucial services to respond to the needs of victim-survivors?

DR PATERSON: I thank the member for the question. This funding is not just about addressing today's pressures; it is also about building a more integrated, sustainable and responsive system that can continue to support people as demand grows. It reflects our commitment to working in partnership with our frontline sector and delivering real change for the community as part of our broader plan for Canberra. The increased funding for DVCS will allow them to continue to deliver critical services, including the 24/7 crisis phone line and the Room4Change program. For the CRCC, it will provide more support for timely access to crisis support and counselling for victim-survivors of sexual violence.

The ACT government also recognises the importance of behaviour change programs for people using violence. We are providing increased ongoing funding to EveryMan to continue their counselling and behaviour change programs, reduce waitlists and ensure the safety of victim-survivors is appropriately managed. This funding also provides tailored support for particular groups, including a range of therapeutic support services for children and young people delivered by Beryl Women and Doris Women refuges and the Australian Childhood Foundation. And we recognise the need for culturally-responsive services. Multicultural Hub will receive \$2 million to continue their Multicultural Women's Service, and a grant pool of \$2 million will be created to support Aboriginal community controlled organisations to deliver services to victim-survivors of sexual violence.

MS TOUGH: Minister, how else is the ACT government supporting victim-survivors of domestic, family and sexual violence?

DR PATERSON: I thank the member for the question. The ACT government recognises there is always more we can do to improve our response to domestic, family and sexual violence. Tomorrow I will be tabling the ACT's 10-year Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Strategy, which reflects the full spectrum of work, from primary prevention, including systemic change to address population drivers of violence through early intervention and crisis response, all the way through to recovery and healing. Their strategy will be implemented through a series of action plans over the next decade. Importantly, we are building on what has already been achieved, including the effective domestic, family and sexual violence programs and services currently provided in our community. We continue to explore ways to ensure the ACT's legislative and justice responses to domestic, family and sexual violence are safer, more effective and trauma informed.

We are progressing work towards the criminalisation of coercive control. In December, the Attorney-General introduced a bill which seeks to create a scheme for family violence safety notices, providing police with more immediate ways to protect the safety of victim-survivors.

The ACT government is continuing to implement recommendations from the Sexual Assault (Police) Review. In last year's budget, we invested nearly \$6½ million over four years to establish sexual assault advocates embedded in ACT Policing to provide

support for people in their engagement with the justice system. Finally, in this budget, we are increasing investment to support Safer Families Assistance grants, ensuring immediate financial support is available for victim-survivors of domestic and family violence.

Mr Barr: I ask that all further questions be placed on the notice paper. It has been a 75-minute marathon today!

Supplementary answer to a question without notice

Health—New South Wales residents

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I was asked during question time about the estimated gap in funding between what New South Wales would pay the ACT for the full cost of services for New South Wales patients versus what it does pay. I have responded to a question on notice for the fiscal sustainability committee that was then reflected in Mr Eslake's report that included an estimate for 2024-25 of \$87.9 million and for 2025-26 of \$93.3 million. Obviously those are only estimates, but that information is publicly available.

Papers

Mr Speaker presented the following papers:

Bills, referred to Committees, pursuant to standing order 174—Correspondence—

Bill—Inquiry—Bail Amendment Bill 2026—Letter to the Speaker from the Chair, Standing Committee on Legal Affairs, dated 13 May 2026.

Bills—Not inquired into—

Fuel Legislation Amendment Bill 2026—Letter to the Speaker from Standing Committee on Environment and Planning, undated.

Justice and Community Safety Legislation Amendment Bill 2026—Letter to the Speaker from the Chair, Standing Committee on Legal Affairs, dated 13 May 2026.

Long Service Leave (Portable Schemes) Amendment Bill 2026—Letter to the Speaker from the Chair, Standing Committee on Economics, Industry and Recreation, dated 20 May 2026.

Standing order—

99B—Petitions—Referral advice—Correspondence—Not inquired into—

e-Pet 065-25—Health services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residents in North of Canberra—Access improvement—Letter to the Speaker from the Chair, Standing Committee on Social Policy, dated 19 May 2026.

e-Pet 071-25 and Pet 019-26—Parkinson's diseases services in the community—Election commitment clarification—Letter to the Speaker from the Chair, Standing Committee on Social Policy, dated 19 May 2026.

e-Pet 072-25—Theatre Lane car park—Partial public access retention—Letter to the Speaker from the Chair, Standing Committee on Transport and City Services, dated 20 May 2026.

e-Pet 083-25—West Belconnen—R2 and R3 rapid bus routes—Letter to the Speaker from the Chair, Standing Committee on Transport and City Services, dated 20 May 2026.

e-Pet 005-26 and Pet 011-26—Draft Amendment 102—Hume Circle Precinct—Extension of consultation period—Letter to the Speaker from the Standing Committee on Environment and Planning, dated 21 May 2026.

191—Amendments to:

Juries (Peremptory Challenges) Amendment Bill 2025, dated 13 and 14 May 2026.

Planning Legislation Amendment Bill 2026, dated 13 and 14 May 2026.

Voluntary assisted dying—Communications—Legislative reform—Assembly resolution of 26 March 2026—Response from President of the Senate and Speaker of the House of Representatives, dated 14 May 2026.

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

Active travel network in Belconnen—Feasibility study and funding consideration—Assembly resolution of 3 December 2025—Government response—First update, dated May 2026.

Auditor-General Act, pursuant to section 21—Auditor-General’s Report No 1/2026—Diversity, equity and inclusion in the ACT Public Service—Government response, dated May 2026.

Environment and Planning—Standing Committee—Report 6—Missing Middle Housing Reform—Inquiry into Draft Major Amendment to the Territory Plan 04—Government response, dated May 2026.

Financial Management Act—

Pursuant to section 26—Consolidated Financial Report for the financial quarter ending 31 March 2026.

Pursuant to subsection 30F(3)—Capital Works Program—Progress report—2025-26—Year-to-date performance as at 31 March 2026.

Planning Act, pursuant to section 77—Planning (Missing Middle Housing Reform) Major Plan Amendment 2026—Notifiable Instrument, dated 22 May 2026.

Remuneration Tribunal Act, pursuant to section 10—Determinations, together with accompanying statements for:

Full-time Statutory Office Holders—

Auditor-General, Clerk of the Legislative Assembly, Electoral Commissioner—Determination 3 of 2026, dated 7 May 2026.

Determination 2 of 2026, dated 7 May 2026.

Head of Service—Directors-General and Executives—Determination 1 of 2026, dated 7 May 2026.

Members of the ACT Legislative Assembly—Determination 6 of 2026, dated 7 May 2026.

Part-time Public Office Holder—Independent Chair, Canberra Institute of Technology Academic Council—Determination 6 of 2024, dated 7 May 2026.

Urban growth boundary—Establishment—Assembly resolution of 10 April 2025—Letter from the Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development to Members of the Legislative Assembly, pursuant to standing order 137A, dated 14 May 2026.

Water quality—Lakes and waterways—Improvement—Assembly resolution of 28 October 2025—Government response, dated May 2026.

Subordinate legislation (including explanatory statements unless otherwise stated)

Legislation Act, pursuant to section 64—

Building (General) Regulation 2008—Building (General) (Alternative requirements for unaltered parts) Determination 2026—Disallowable Instrument DI2026-43 (LR, 23 April 2026).

Building Act—

Building (ACT Appendix to the Building Code) Determination 2026—Disallowable Instrument DI2026-42 (LR, 23 April 2026).

Building (ACT Appendix to the Building Code) Determination 2026 (No 2)—Disallowable Instrument DI2026-56 (LR, 30 April 2026).

Children and Young People Act—Children and Young People (Care and Protection Organisations) Guidelines Revocation 2026—Disallowable Instrument DI2026-53 (LR, 30 April 2026).

Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment Act—Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment Appointment 2026—Disallowable Instrument DI2026-36 (LR, 20 April 2026).

Firearms Act—Firearms Amendment Regulation 2026 (No 1)—Subordinate Law SL2026-3 (LR, 7 May 2026).

Heritage Act—

Heritage (Council Member) Appointment 2026 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2026-38 (LR, 23 April 2026).

Heritage (Council Member) Appointment 2026 (No 2)—Disallowable Instrument DI2026-39 (LR, 23 April 2026).

Heritage (Council Member) Appointment 2026 (No 3)—Disallowable Instrument DI2026-40 (LR, 23 April 2026).

Land Tax Act—Land Tax (Affordable Community Housing) Determination 2026—Disallowable Instrument DI2026-59 (LR, 11 May 2026).

Major Events Act—Major Events (AFL GWS Giants v North Melbourne Kangaroos Match) Notice 2026—Disallowable Instrument DI2026-37 (LR, 16 April 2026).

Planning Act—Planning (Protected Matters) Declaration Revocation 2026—Disallowable Instrument DI2026-57 (LR, 7 May 2026).

Race and Sports Bookmaking Act—Race and Sports Bookmaking (Sports Bookmaking Events) Determination 2026 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2026-34 (LR, 7 April 2026).

Road Transport (General) Act—

Road Transport (General) (Driver Licence and Related Fees) Determination 2026 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2026-44 (LR, 23 April 2026).

Road Transport (General) (Fees for Publications) Determination 2026 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2026-45 (LR, 23 April 2026).

Road Transport (General) (Numberplate Fees) Determination 2026 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2026-46 (LR, 23 April 2026).

Road Transport (General) (Parking Permit Fees) Determination 2026 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2026-47 (LR, 23 April 2026).

Road Transport (General) (Pay Parking Area Fees) Determination 2026 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2026-48 (LR, 28 April 2026).

Road Transport (General) (Refund and Dishonoured Payments Fees) Determination 2026 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2026-49 (LR, 23 April 2026).

Road Transport (General) (Road Safety Contribution) Determination 2026 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2026-50 (LR, 28 April 2026).

Road Transport (General) (Vehicle Impounding and Seizure/Speed Trial Fees) Determination 2026 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2026-51 (LR, 28 April 2026).

Road Transport (General) (Vehicle Registration and Related Fees) Determination 2026 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2026-52 (LR, 28 April 2026).

Road Transport (General) Application of Road Transport Legislation (Corroboree Group Oval Manuka) Declaration 2026 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2026-41

Road Transport (Public Passenger Services) Act—Road Transport (Public Passenger Services) Maximum Fares for Taxi Services Determination 2026 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2026-35 (LR, 9 April 2026).

Veterinary Practice Act—

Veterinary Practice (Board) Appointment 2026 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument

DI2026-58 (LR, 4 May 2026).

Veterinary Practice (Fees) Determination 2026 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument

DI2026-54 (LR, 30 April 2026).

Water and Sewerage Act—

Water and Sewerage (ACT Appendix to the Plumbing Code) Determination 2026—Disallowable Instrument DI2026-55 (LR, 30 April 2026).

Water and Sewerage Amendment Regulation 2026 (No 1)—Subordinate Law SL2026-2 (LR, 23 April 2026).

Teachers—enterprise bargaining

MS LEE (Kurrajong) (3.15): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) the industrial action taken by ACT educators last week follows months of frustration with the Government's failure to meaningfully engage on crucial issues including workforce sustainability, adequate staffing levels, support for inclusive training, rising workloads and staff wellbeing;
- (b) this action is the first time ACT educators have taken stop-work action in 15 years and the first time ever that school assistants participated in industrial action alongside teachers, school leaders and school psychologists;
- (c) the Australian Education Union (AEU) ACT Branch President Angela Burroughs has said the decision to take action reflects a workforce that has been pushed to its limit; and

- (d) the AEU ACT has announced that further industrial action is planned for June if the Government fails to negotiate in good faith;
- (2) further notes:
- (a) the following public comments by ACT Parents Executive Officer, Ms Veronica Elliot, in support of the action taken by ACT educators:
 - (i) “parents consistently tell us they want fewer split classes, more relief teachers, more Learning Support Assistants and sustainable staffing in schools”; and
 - (ii) “families can see staff working hard in challenging conditions, but they are frustrated by the frequency of learning disruption when schools cannot source relief teachers or adequately support students with additional needs”; and
 - (b) that Ms Elliott said ACT Parents supports ACT public school teachers and school staff in their calls for improved staffing, sustainable workloads and stronger support for students, because these measures directly improve learning conditions for students; and
- (3) calls on the Minister for Education to:
- (a) direct the Education Directorate to immediately return to the bargaining table to address the outstanding issues raised by educators and to make genuine progress in negotiations before any further stop-work action; and
 - (b) report back to the Assembly by noon on 28 May 2026 on the action she has taken to ensure her Directorate is progressing the claims by ACT educators.

“Our working conditions equals their learning conditions”; “Recognise our experience”; “Stop splitting my class. I’m not pizza.” These are the words of the educators of our students written on placards held high last Friday morning. These are the words that can no longer be ignored. These are the words of exhausted teachers, of learning support staff stretched beyond capacity and of professionals who care deeply about their students but who are being pushed to breaking point. These are the words of students who are worried about the impact of an overwhelmed workforce on their education. Behind every one of these signs is a story: a teacher managing split classes because there is no relief staff; a classroom where needs are growing but support is disappearing; an educator going home at the end of the day not just tired, but drained.

For over nine months our educators have negotiated, they have advocated and they have waited. After all that time, this government has still failed to put forward a genuine offer that reflects the reality in our schools. This is not just disappointing; it is dismissive—dismissive of their experience, dismissive of their professionalism and dismissive of the students whose learning depends on a supported sustainable workforce. When teachers say, “Our working conditions equal their learning conditions,” they are not making a slogan; this is stating a fact: this government’s lack of respect for unsustainable workloads, lack of respect for a workforce that is at breaking point and a lack of respect for what parents, carers and the broader community are calling for.

This minister has stood in this chamber and spoken about the rights of educators to take industrial action. She has told us that her directorate is negotiating in good faith and she

has told us that it is all under control. But it is clear that this minister is not listening. She is not listening to our educators who are on the ground. She is not listening to the parents who can see the impact a strained and overwhelmed workforce is having on their children. The only people she is listening to are the officials—the same officials who cancelled bargaining meetings, the same officials who have failed to put forward a genuine offer.

Last week, ACT parents, who represent parents, carers and parents and citizens associations in ACT government schools, made their position clear. They acknowledged that industrial action causes disruption and they acknowledged the inconvenience to families. But, importantly, they also said they understand why teachers and school staff are taking this action. In the media release, they said, “Families see the impact workforce shortages have on student learning every day, including split classrooms, difficulty accessing relief teachers and reduced support for students who need it.” This is not abstract. This is not theoretical. This is everyday reality in ACT classrooms. Parents have said clearly that they want fewer split classes, more relief teachers, more learning support assistance and sustainable staffing in schools—because, right now, the burden our teachers are being asked to bear is not sustainable. Workloads are increasing, administrative demands continue to grow, behavioural complexity in classrooms is rising and staffing shortages mean fewer colleagues to share that load.

We have seen instances of occupational violence, which the minister’s own annual report states as “the most significant risk to health and safety of workers in ACT public schools” increasing year on year. According to findings from the ACU Australian Principal Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Survey, ACT principals are experiencing some of the highest rates of violence and safety concerns in the country, with threats of violence more than doubling over time and physical violence increasing dramatically. The result? Dedicated professionals, people who entered the teaching profession to make a difference, are being pushed to the brink.

It is important to be clear about something in this debate. The AEU’s claims are not all about money. Yes, pay is, of course, a part of it. But a significant part of what they are raising goes to workload, it goes to conditions and it goes to the sustainability of the profession. When we look at the Education Directorate’s own annual report, that context becomes even more stark and important. The report shows a workforce of over 8,960 full-time equivalent staff yet less than half are teachers. Let me repeat that: less than half of the 8,960 full-time staff in the Education Directorate are actually working as teachers. That tells us something critical. The pressures in the system are not just about classroom staffing numbers; they are also about how the system is structured, how resources are allocated and how much support is or is not reaching frontline teachers.

When teachers talk about workload, they are not just talking about pay; they are talking about time, they are talking about administrative burden and they are talking about their inability to actually focus on what they do best—teaching. They are talking about the learning environment they create for our children to learn. They are talking about staff wellbeing, morale and career satisfaction and progress. They are talking about giving our children the best start in life for a great future. If we reduce this discussion to dollars alone, we miss the bigger picture: how we ensure the education system is set up so

teachers can do their jobs effectively and students get the attention and the education that they deserve.

We cannot separate educator wellbeing from student wellbeing. When our educators are exhausted, overstretched and unsupported, learning suffers. When schools cannot fill roles, disruption becomes the norm. When support staff are stretched too thin, students with additional needs miss out. ACT parents have set a plan: families want consistent teaching, settled classrooms and the supports students need to learn—and they are right, because every student deserves a qualified teacher in front of them every day, every student deserves a safe learning environment and every educator deserves to be treated with respect. This minister and this government have failed. They have failed to ensure our schools are properly staffed, they have failed to ensure that they address unsustainable workloads and they have failed to listen to our educators. Improved staffing, sustainable workloads and stronger support for students are not radical demands. It is the bare minimum families expect and should expect—and, quite frankly, they deserve to expect—from a public education system.

I call on the minister to stop hiding behind her officials, to finally start listening to educators, to parents and to students, and act now to invest in the workforce; act now to reduce workloads; and act now to improve conditions so that teaching in the ACT is a profession that people enter and stay in with confidence. If the minister ignores this motion and fails to act, the consequences are clear: more shortages, more disruption, more teachers leaving the profession and a system that cannot deliver the quality education our children deserve. This is not just about teachers; it is about students, it is about families and it is about the future of education in the ACT. Respect our educators, support them properly and give our students the learning conditions that they deserve. I commend my 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) (3.25): I rise to respond to Ms Lee’s AEU recent protected industrial action and the motion from her on that. I have to say that I welcome Ms Lee and her colleagues’ newfound interest in the value of union movement actions and, indeed, the interest of workers. It should provide me with comfort but it just makes me nervous.

I would like to take this time, though, to provide an update on where bargaining between the Education Directorate, as the employer, and the AEU is up to right now. Enterprise bargaining for all ACT public service enterprise agreements is currently underway. Folks will have seen that there has been some activity across the city from unions with purpose in progressing their claims. This includes negotiations for the common core across all ACTPS enterprise agreements. For the Education Directorate and staff in ACT public schools, this includes the Education Directorate Teaching Staff Agreement, the Education Specific Schedule of the Administrative and Related Classifications Enterprise Agreement as well as the Infrastructure Services Enterprise Agreement.

In April, the AEU made an application to the Fair Work Commission for a protected action ballot. That ballot came back in favour of industrial action, which started in May. I would be the last person to object to any union taking protected action should they feel that it is necessary. Everyone knows my background of supporting workers—so it should come as no surprise. I have also said publicly that I understand the AEU’s

concerns. They have raised those with me privately and publicly and they have raised them with Canberrans as well, as they are entitled to do. They are advocating for the best outcomes for their members. I want to be very clear that the ACT government and I recognise and respect the rights of ACT public school staff to take protected industrial action.

That brings me back to Ms Lee's motion. The motion calls on me as the Minister for Education to direct the Education Directorate to immediately return to the bargaining table. The issue here is that the bargaining has never ceased. It has been happening and nobody has walked away from the table. I do understand, however, and appreciate that the AEU, CPSU and UWU are frustrated with the length of time that bargaining has taken. I am frustrated too. I also understand that the AEU would like the negotiations to be more advanced than they are.

I know that those opposite are new to this world of workers' rights, but bargaining can be complex. It can take time. I understand everybody wants this work done as quickly as possible and I do too. Industrial action can be very disruptive. I am briefed regularly by the Education Directorate on the progress of negotiations, and they are very clear on my expectations. I also know that they have recently increased the frequency of bargaining meetings to weekly and that they are committed to making progress on the claims. There is a meeting scheduled with the directorate and the AEU on the teaching agreement tomorrow, Wednesday, and there were discussions with the AEU and the CPSU yesterday, on Monday, about the administrative agreement. The Education Directorate is working on this matter as a priority.

I believe I have a strong working relationship with the AEU. I respect the role that they play and the work that they do representing their members. They are important partners in the provision of public education in the ACT. I am currently formally meeting with them weekly, and I will continue to meet with them as frequently as needed. My office and/or I have been in contact with them most days, if not every day, over the last couple of weeks.

Everyone wants to reach a beneficial and fair result for our workplaces and our school communities that leads to the best possible provision of public education in the ACT. So to all of the union members in our schools: I know you are frustrated. I encourage you to continue to participate in the bargaining process, even when it means taking industrial action. The best way to make sure that you have your say about your workplace is to be an active member of your union. I also want to thank the students and parents for their patience. As the operational impacts of industrial action are managed, I know that this is not an ideal situation.

Parents know that good teaching conditions are good learning conditions, and I acknowledge the advocacy of ACT parents as well in supporting union members in their action. The directorate are working with the AEU to plan for upcoming industrial action and will communicate as early as possible about the operational impacts, including to ensure that students are not disadvantaged for assessment. To all of the people that have already taken the time to write directly to me, I want to thank you. I read all of your correspondence and I always appreciate hearing directly from you. Nobody wants to get to the point where they need to take industrial action, but I acknowledge that we are, unfortunately, here now. My commitment is to keep working

hard with unions and my colleagues to get the best and the fairest outcome for everyone.

I also understand that Miss Nuttall has an amendment to Ms Lee's motion, which the government will be supporting as well. I absolutely look forward to reporting back to the Assembly as bargaining progresses along the way. The government will be supporting Ms Lee's motion. I am happy to report back as required.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (3.31): I rise to speak in support of Ms Lee's motion this afternoon. As we all know, and often reflect on in this place, Canberra's educators do incredibly important work and much of it is hugely undervalued. But, by and large, educators get on with it, because they see the value and the importance of their work.

This is the first time ACT educators have taken a stop-work action in 15 years. Clearly, this decision has not been made lightly. Educators have been in negotiations on this for almost a year with the directorate. Last year, we learnt that 77 of the 92 ACT public schools were either over budget or set to be by the end of the year—84 per cent of schools. Principals, teachers and support staff in each of these 77 schools surely cannot be the blame for this. They are doing everything they can to deliver for our kids and often they are becoming burnt out along the way.

What has been missing is genuine leadership from the government on this to provide appropriate resources and coordination across the system. For too long, each school has been working in isolation, developing its own resources and managing its own budget. While I understand the philosophical basis of this independence and the history of it, it is clearly problematic for a large and growing system to be missing out on so many efficiencies of scale due to the lack of directorate-led coordination between schools. We have even been hearing of P&Cs having to raise their own funds for critical school improvements as a consequence of this—which raises the question of what the schools without strong P&Cs are able to do or not do.

I say all this because the industrial action we have seen and we are seeing occurs in this context. This action is destructive; it is problematic for parents; it is problematic for our public transport system—apparently; and, of course, it is problematic for our children. Educators know that. My sense is that, nonetheless, despite it being disruptive, the majority of Canberrans are largely backing in educators on this. Our community wants to see these disagreements resolved quickly and wants to see our educators valued appropriately.

I have a German friend, who became a qualified educator and recently got a job in a government school. For him, being a teacher, getting a job for the government, was like, "You have got it made for the rest of your life." This is top tier stuff in that country if you get into that position and it is valued by the country. I suppose it is like getting tenure at a university or perhaps getting elected in a very safe seat: you have won the lottery if you get that job in his country. There are countries like that. But I think this is something we struggle with not just here in the ACT, but across Australia: putting appropriate value on the education system; putting appropriate value on the work of educators; and, through them, actually prioritising what is best for our kids, our greatest asset, and what is best for the next generation.

In that context, I think that is a part of why I think so many Canberrans support our

educators in the action that they have been taking. I think this is how we should be thinking about teachers. If we can move more in that direction here in the ACT, that would be a welcome thing. It would be a good thing for us to do—not just for educators, who are stretched, not just for the children they are supporting and not just for their families, but also for us as a society and for us as a community.

So, in short, I do support Ms Lee’s calls for the government to get this sorted at the bargaining table as soon as possible. I note there are some minor amendments that are to be put, courtesy of Miss Nuttall’s amendment, which I am happy to support and which I understand has the support of the opposition and, as we have just heard, from the government as well.

Canberrans believe in public education. They want to see our public education system succeed and they want to see leadership on that front. The success of educators is obviously absolutely critical to this—which, again, is why I am pleased to support Ms Lee’s motion today and I thank her for bringing it forward.

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (3.34): I move:

Omit all text in paragraph (3), substitute:

“(3) calls on the Minister for Education and Early Childhood in collaboration with the Minister for the Public Service to:

- (a) direct the responsible directorates to resume enterprise bargaining negotiations with school-based employees covered by ACT public sector enterprise agreements, with the express objective of considering outstanding claims raised by employees and their representatives in a comprehensive and timely manner, to support union members in not needing to take further protected industrial action;
- (b) publicly respond to the outcomes of the “School Assistant Classification Standards Framework” review and acknowledge that ACT school-based employees should receive nationally competitive salaries and working conditions;
- (c) report back to the Assembly on the morning of 10 June with a Ministerial Statement outlining the actions taken to progress the claims on workload, staffing, safety, inclusion and pay by employee representatives of ACT school-based employees, as well as actions under paragraph (3)(b).”.

The ACT Greens will be supporting this worthy motion from Ms Lee. The amendment that I have moved will, I believe, strengthen its calls on the government.

The reason this motion has come before the Assembly today is because the ACT government has driven our teachers, our school assistants, school psychologists, principals, business managers, teacher librarians and schools in the ACT to breaking point. This point looks like all sorts of things. It looks like pure exhaustion and burnout for teachers. It looks like learning support assistants getting absolute pennies, despite our most vulnerable children relying on them to be included in learning. It looks like incredible educators being forced to leave their careers, despite feeling it is their vocation, because they simply cannot keep working hours of overtime with unfair conditions and, what is more, they simply cannot keep doing so for below inflation pay. Most blatantly, the breaking point looks like being left with no choice but to take

industrial action—and that is where we are at.

Last Friday morning at the Ainslie Football Club, I stood in solidarity with the AEU and in strong support of their plans for a fairer workload, staffing requirements, safe working conditions, improved inclusion in our schools and better pay. The line to get in wrapped all around the building. It split off at points. I reckon there were probably 300-odd of us outside on the oval because AEU members had filled the entire venue with a sea of red.

I actually ended up in line right behind one of my old physics teachers from college. He was brilliant and a big reason I stayed in STEM as long as I did before politics. He had such a brilliant way of breaking down concepts, because he cared about science and he cared about students caring about science. I ran into my old maths teacher too—to date, the only constituent I have ever had tell me that we actually need to increase taxes, progressively of course, because the ACT has a limited revenue base. She is also the only reason that I got through my college minor in maths. She was so frustrated by how little school assistants were paid or acknowledged. She had run the maths, on the government's current offer, and was quite horrified.

My old teachers are awesome. I hope they do not mind me saying that they looked exhausted—buoyed by what looked like every school-based staff member in the ACT turning up to protest, but so run down by the workloads and by having reasonable claims ignored again and again. They could see the writing on the wall, which is why they gave up what could have been precious leave time to stand outside and get loud. I was there not just in support of their claims—which I will speak to in more detail shortly—but also in real, personal outrage and umbrage on behalf of my old teachers for the government's failure to engage with the AEU on bargaining—nine months later—especially for claims as basic as fair pay and safe working conditions.

It is important to be clear about what teachers and school staff are actually asking for. To spoil my own speech, I can tell you right now that it is all pretty darned reasonable. I want us all to consider the very real fact that educators' working conditions are also students' learning conditions and that those who have gone on strike—and will be going on strike again come 11 June if the government does not act fast—are not just striking for themselves; they are striking for the kids they teach, who they want to be able to give a proper education to. In the words of the AEU, if we want our kids to have a strong, nation-leading education, we must give those who teach them strong, nation-leading work conditions and pay.

Now onto the claims: the AEU is calling for a guaranteed minimum staffing so that classes are not continually split, collapsed or cancelled and for real action to reduce the workload and administrative burden which school staff are under. Mind you, this already happens in other jurisdictions. It is not like it is a novel thing or the ACT would be a major leading jurisdiction there. The AEU is calling for nation-leading pay to retain experienced teachers. It is absolutely shocking to me that, with this alone, with the added context of thousands of teachers striking, the government is not hearing the alarm bells ringing. You have to wonder: how are they willing to risk losing thousands of teachers from our ACT public schools? It is absurd. The AEU is also seeking stronger supports for inclusive education, so that students with complex needs are properly supported, alongside better recognition of the vital work of learning assistants, school

psychologists and specialist teachers in this space.

The critical role of school assistants and their unjust relegation with low wages and poor recognition, is a key part of the AEU's calls and, in turn, a key reason for my amendment to Ms Lee's motion. This amendment adds an additional call for the government to publicly respond to the outcomes of the School Assistant Classification Framework and acknowledge that ACT school-based employees should receive nationally competitive salaries and working conditions. The School Assistant Classification Framework review is a workforce framework that defines school assistant roles, work value and career paths, intended to ensure classification and remuneration accurately reflect the complexity of their work.

The government have acknowledged that the role of learning assistants has become increasingly complex; yet they have not updated how they define and remunerate learning assistants to reflect this increased complexity. By getting the government to publicly respond to this framework, the ACT Greens want to ensure that learning assistants, schools and students, at the very least, get an explanation for why and how this discrepancy in conditions can possibly be the case. Parents, too, deserve an explanation. I would like to briefly read out some words which a concerned parent from the community wrote me and whose words reflect many others I have received. She writes:

I have a neurodivergent child who started Kindy this year at one of our fabulous Canberra Public Schools. He struggles a great deal with separation and transitions and—on a bad day—drop off can take up to half an hour.

His teacher is absolutely wonderful. She regularly steps in to help calm and support him—while also trying to commence learning for the other 15 students in her class—often more when other classes are split. Like so many teachers, she is being asked to do the impossible.

It is always such a relief to see the smiling face of an LSA who provides invaluable support, patience and kindness in supporting my son to start the day. Often it's the only way I'm able to leave to get to work.

I've also seen just how deeply instability in the classroom affects other children. When my son's teacher is away and the class is split, drop-off becomes distressing for so many students—children in tears, clinging to their parents, overwhelmed by a change they can't yet regulate or understand. In those moments, the familiar LSA becomes an emotional anchor. They provide consistency, trust and safety in an environment that suddenly feels uncertain. These relationships aren't an optional extra in our schools—they are critical to helping children feel secure enough to learn, participate and thrive.

As a parent of neurodivergent children, I know firsthand the patience, compassion and expertise it takes to support children with additional needs. Classrooms are increasingly complex places, and the work our teachers and support staff do every single day is skilled, demanding and deeply human.

Most teachers and LSAs don't do this work for praise or recognition, they do it because they love it and because they care deeply about children. But passion should never be an excuse for underpaying and undervaluing the very people we entrust with our children's care, education and future. There is no job more

important than shaping and supporting our kids, and the people who do it deserve far greater respect, security and pay.

What the AEU is calling for, what teachers, school assistants and all school-based staff in our territory are striking for, is simple and essential. It is safety and inclusion, a manageable workload and staffing and, goodness, proper pay that at least meets inflation. They are calling for the respect they need to do their jobs well and, in turn, learning conditions which enable every student in the ACT to access high-quality public education—because, once again, teachers’ working conditions are also our students’ learning conditions.

I want to briefly make a couple of points. When the minister spoke, she spoke to the importance of industrial action and to strikes, and I thought that was a gracious response. I just want to make the point that, if the minister is well-intentioned—and I believe she is—it is her Labor cabinet that needs to back her right now. I am concerned, just looking around the room, that none of her ministerial colleagues think the debate is relevant enough to them to be in the chamber right now. I would encourage them to pay closer to the education space, because, as everyone has pointed out, education is the foundation for a thriving community.

The AEU’s claims do not just stand up for their workers who deserve better from the ACT government; they are also practical and necessary steps to make our schools in the ACT sustainable. If the government does not come to the table and actually agree to the claims, the consequences will continue to be borne by not just our schools but also our entire community. There is a reason why teaching strikes get immediate media coverage and spark massive community outrage: it is because parents have to stay home from work or arrange child-minding arrangements. This impact is not incidental; it underscores how pivotal our public schools are to the core functioning of our society. When educators strike, it’s not because they want to disrupt families—many teachers I spoke to at the strike had had to organise child-minding for their own kids; it is because they have been left with no other option. It is a last resort after being ignored, delayed and dismissed for far too long.

So my question to the government is: will you listen to them? Will you recognise that these are not extravagant demands but the bare minimum needed to sustain our education system in the ACT; will you acknowledge that inclusive education cannot exist without properly supported and properly paid staff; and will you accept that every day you fail to come to the table risks doing lasting damage to our schools and our teaching workforce? We cannot keep expecting the goodwill of educators to carry a system that is under such immense strain. We cannot keep relying on the passion of teachers and school staff while eroding the conditions that allow them to do their jobs. It feels endless but, eventually, the goodwill does run out. When it does, we not only lose our teachers, school assistants, principals, school psychologists, business managers and teacher librarians but also take equitable access to education away from our students in the ACT. We cannot afford to do that.

I commend my amendment and Ms Lee’s motion to the Assembly.

MS BARRY (Ginninderra) (3.46): I thank Ms Lee for bringing this motion to the Assembly for debate. From the conversations we have had, it is obvious that we are

backing our teachers, and Ms Lee is doing what the government is not willing to do, which is to listen and to respond to serious issues in our education system.

This motion comes at a very significant time for our teachers, our school assistants and everyone who is involved in educating our kids. Just last week, we saw the result of their accumulated frustration that stemmed from a lack of engagement by the government and a failure to respond to serious issues that are crippling our education system.

This is not a new issue. Time and time again, we have seen this government fail to adequately consult and negotiate with stakeholders. Teachers have told us that they are burnt out, that they are asked to do more than just teach, that the administrative burden is overwhelming and that the policy settings are making teaching very difficult.

It will come as no surprise to anybody in this chamber that, to me, education provides one of the hallmarks of a society. As a mother, I hope for only the best and brightest future for our children. Education provides the foundation for that. Having a public education system where teachers are appreciated, where their roles are supported and where schools are adequately resourced is a core responsibility of any responsible government.

As someone who has benefited from a great education—and it is probably part of the reason why I could move 10,000 miles to look for a better future and to plan a better pathway for myself—I value education. I also know that a well-educated society creates a more cohesive society. Looking after our educators is therefore in the interests of all Canberrans, all of Australia and the society at large.

Ms Lee has perfectly articulated why this motion is important right now and has asked for one simple thing—that the government address the outstanding issues raised by educators and make genuine progress in negotiations before there is any further stop-work action. That is not too much to ask.

We heard from Angela Burroughs last week about how exhausted teachers are because of the increased workload, class sizes and staffing constraints. This clearly has an impact on students and parents, and it puts more pressure on our system and the educational experience of our students.

The motion clearly reflects the fact that ACT Parents support ACT public schools and teachers in their calls for improvements. The ACT government needs to step up. It needs to instil a better practice for engagement with teachers to ensure there is a timely response to issues that they raise.

What we are now seeing is a neglectful attitude to problems which become systemic issues, and the Labor government needs to change its approach. The Labor government needs to view active and frequent consultation with stakeholders in all areas not just as a core obligation, but as a vital component of how responsible government make policies and proactively respond to issues. At the heart of this motion is a call for the government to come to the table with teachers and listen to the issues that they are experiencing.

The action led by ACT educators last week was significant. They do not make public statements like that lightly. It is a clear message that they have had enough, and that they need to be listened to so that our public school education system starts to get improved and better outcomes for our students.

I also agree with Ms Lee that the problem is not just about money. I heard, for example, yesterday from a young woman who was driven out of our education system because she was increasingly under pressure. She felt unsupported in her workplace, and she felt that she could not contribute to a vocation that she loved so much. She wanted to be a teacher. She applied; she qualified to be a teacher, and she just could not teach because the government's policies made it difficult for her to do so.

Again, it is not just about money. I can reflect on the conversations we had during the ATAR committee hearing, where we heard from the Australian Education Union that the problem we had in the sector, particularly around ATAR language, was a lack of direction from the minister and the lack of outcome-focused planning. That is a significant indictment by the AEU of the minister, and we see those issues reflected today.

Mr Deputy Speaker, when I was growing up, I thought doctors were the gods of society. I thought being a doctor was the best job you could ever have. When I had children, though, and I had to send them to school, I realised that teachers were the best people in our society. They do so much for our children. They deal with all our little minions who we in this place know—those who have children—can be a handful. I cannot imagine, for the life of me, dealing with a classful of 16-year-olds. I cannot imagine, for the life of me, dealing with a classful of 13-year-olds to 16-year-olds. It is not a job that I would ever do. We should be grateful to our teachers that they are doing so much more to educate our children, and the least we can do is support them to do that.

Once again, I thank Ms Lee for the motion, and I commend the motion to the Assembly.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (3.54): I rise to speak briefly to Miss Nuttall's amendment to the motion. I note her comments about no other ministers being in the chamber. I was outside making a call, but I am very pleased to speak in this debate, because our teachers and our learning support staff are highly valued by the ACT government right across the board. We all recognise the importance of education.

Like the Deputy Chief Minister and minister for education, I am a product of ACT public schools, and I am really proud of that fact. I know that the Treasurer is also very proud of our public education system. We want to reassure our teachers and our learning support staff right across our public education system about how much we value their work, and that we are listening to them.

I want to put some context around this debate in terms of the bargaining process, and the way enterprise bargaining works in ACT government. This is my third enterprise bargaining round since being a minister, and this round has actually been a lot more streamlined than previous enterprise bargaining processes.

As I talked about in question time, there are two streams of bargaining. There is the core bargaining that then underpins the admin agreement, and it sets the pay and conditions largely for the whole ACT government workforce; then there is stream bargaining that looks at some of the specific conditions, and things like rostering arrangements or other leave arrangements that are specific to individual workforces across our directorates.

In this bargaining round, unlike previous ones, we have been undertaking those two streams of negotiations in parallel. That has meant a lot of work for our bargaining representatives on both the management side and our union colleagues.

The Office of Industrial Relations and Workforce Strategy has been supporting directorates through this process, including the Education Directorate. As the Deputy Chief Minister has indicated, the Education Directorate is leading this particular process, and this is in relation to two things. Firstly, there is the schedule to the administrative agreement, and then the actual enterprise agreements that are supporting our teaching and learning support staff.

As part of the negotiation of the core agreement, as I mentioned in question time, the government has made a sustainable but competitive offer which is above forecast inflation for every year of the agreement over the next three years, according to federal Treasury forecasts.

We have also included in that offer some significant improvements to conditions. The offer includes not only three per cent each year, in terms of pay rise, with a 1½ per cent salary increase each year, in July and February, but also an increase in superannuation, reaching 13 per cent before the end of the agreement, making that a highly competitive superannuation outcome.

In addition, the pay and entitlements offer includes enhanced leave provisions to improve flexibility and support for employees, including parental leave changes from 1 July 2027 to consolidate leave types for ease of understanding and access. That includes the existing 24 weeks paid leave to birthing parents; 18 weeks paid leave for non-birthing parents, which significantly streamlines and increases the availability of paid leave for non-birthing parents; expanded access to parental leave for both parents, with the option to take leave concurrently and flexibly within a 24-month period; removal of the 12-month service requirement for permanent employees to access the new parental leave entitlement; paid premature birth leave; increased reproductive health leave; extended religious leave to cover other cultural purposes; removal of the cap on family, domestic and sexual violence leave; and improved leave and entitlements for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, as part of our commitment to ensuring that the ACT public service is a culturally safe workplace and is characterised by cultural integrity right across our workforce.

We are, as a government, committed to continuing to bargain in good faith. We have a longstanding tradition of working collaboratively with unions, with bargaining representatives and our employees to ensure employment arrangements remain current, fair, consistent and easy to understand and apply. That is why we have some of the best-paid public sector workers in the country. That is a record that we are proud of. This approach will continue as bargaining progresses, with a strong focus on respectful,

transparent and constructive negotiations.

For the core, our public sector bargaining team has held 43 common core bargaining meetings, with the 44th being scheduled for this Thursday, 28 May. It has been a lot of work. We recognise that for some workforces, some of their individual claims have not been responded to as quickly as they would have liked. That is partly around the order in which some of these processes and decisions need to be made.

Again, I want to take the opportunity to support what Minister Berry has said about the importance of our teaching and learning support workforce, and how much we value the contribution that they make to the ACT. We will continue to engage collaboratively, in good faith, to continue this bargaining, and we respect their rights to take industrial action and to assert their rights through the bargaining process. That is part of being Labor. It is nice to see those opposite supporting the rights of teachers, and we will continue to engage with those teachers and learning support staff in good faith.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS (Brindabella) (4.00): I thank Ms Lee for the motion and Miss Nuttall for her amendment. I will go to a little bit of history. For many years, my father was the AEU's convener at Lake Tuggeranong College, and he coordinated the strike action at that school that seemed to last for all of 1996. That is the teacher strike I remember, because I was in year 9 at Stromlo High School and felt a little bit sorry for the otherwise deservedly maligned year 10s when that year's legendary year 10 camp at Lake Tabourie was cancelled.

I asked "old man Gibbings" what he thought of this motion. He said that, superficially, it appeared that Ms Lee was breaking from what, in his experience, was a conservative doctrine in the ACT, and actively supporting public education in the territory. So that is positive. Apart from noting that it stated the bleeding obvious, that this was the first strike action in 15 years, he suggested that it is very rare for an Australian conservative party to provide tacit support to union members who feel that they have been pushed to their limit.

Instead of making a fatuous point about how far around Sir Robert Gordon Menzies would be turning in his grave at this possibility, dad pointed me to one of his statements. He was proud, Menzies said, to lead a party that declared in 1946 that—and I quote:

... the Court ought to have power to declare certain strikes and lockouts illegal ... we would provide in such cases of illegality for prosecution, the freezing of funds, and de-registration."

Whether Ms Lee and the Canberra Liberals are giving Australia's longest-serving Prime Minister post-mortem apoplexy is debatable because, unlike the Deputy Chief Minister, who has told the Assembly many times that she and the government support the right of teachers to take protected action, Ms Lee has not suggested, in this motion or in her speech, that she and the Canberra Liberals support the AEC in their strike and the principles for which they are striking. I hope they do at some point because that would (1) make this a much more authentic motion and (2) lay down a very important precedent for unions negotiating with any alternative Canberra Liberals-led government.

Dad went on to point out the emptiness of this motion, because not only does it fail to define what the Canberra Liberals believe negotiating in good faith in an industrial dispute means, but it merely highlights the problems which we—particularly parents of public school students and their teachers—are all aware of, without offering solutions, which is less positive.

Ms Lee has been careful to avoid calling for more funding on the radio this morning, or in this motion, yet the ACT public system competes for teachers with private schools, often over-funded with public funds, in the context of a nationwide shortage of teachers. What is the solution for that, and for increasing resources for inclusive training, if not more money? What is the solution to rising workloads and enhanced workforce sustainability, if not more teachers?

Teachers are so important to our society. As I have said before, based on my two—which felt like six—months of experience of homeschooling during COVID, I am happy if ACT public school teachers are all paid a million dollars a year, and to hell with Saul Eslake. Those teachers who commit to teaching in public schools are doing our society an incalculable service because they bear the vast majority of responsibility for delivering the Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration's national goal of educational equity.

I say this because about 13 per cent of students in public schools are from low socio-economic status families, compared to six per cent in Catholic schools and three per cent in independent schools. Eighty per cent of low-SES students are enrolled in public schools, compared to 15 per cent in Catholic schools and five per cent in independent schools. Seventy per cent of Indigenous students are enrolled in public schools, compared to 18 per cent in Catholic schools and five per cent in independent schools.

Historically, the large proportion of students with a disability are enrolled in public schools as well. Yet, despite these numbers, 98 per cent of Australian private schools, including a number in the ACT, are funded to more than 100 per cent of the school resourcing standard, according to the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, while 98 per cent of Australian public schools are not funded to 100 per cent of the SRS. The fully funded two per cent are those schools in the ACT public system, and only those schools.

The minister has repeatedly made it clear that the SRS is the flaw of this government's school funding ambition, not the never-reached ceiling in every other Australian state or territory. This ambition has to be tempered by the times. And the times that ACT teachers and the ACT government are working in and managing are not unique to the ACT. The situation in Victoria has been well documented.

I recently read about, in February this year, San Francisco public school teachers staging their first strike in nearly 50 years about wages. In that city, the teachers union in the San Francisco unified school district had been negotiating for nearly a year over teachers' demands for salary raises and more resources for students with special needs. The strike ended after both sides accepted a compromise from a neutral fact-finding panel, which largely sided with the district's arguments that it was financially constrained. However, before reaching deals on raises, the union and district agreed on terms that included artificial intelligence.

It is on this point where last night dad did some of the work that this motion does not do and suggested at least a starting point for solutions. He said that, given AI places education in a whole new paradigm, there are a number of ideas that could be adopted to address a lot of the AEU's concerns, and that is the big discussion that needs to be had. I agree with him and suggest that this Assembly should start thinking about having it.

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (4.07): I was contemplating not getting up, given this has been a fairly extended debate, but, at the same time, I was genuinely struck by some of the comments by Ms Lee today. In particular, I want to reflect on one that Miss Nuttall reflected on too: the comment from teachers that educators' working conditions are students' learning conditions. As a father and as someone who has sat on school boards before and as someone who has been taking their children to school open nights—it feels like it has been so frequently recently—I have to say it resonates pretty deeply.

Having watched the impact of some pretty appalling learning conditions and then sat down with the teachers who were trying to teach in those conditions, it is pretty clear that something is not going right. Education in the ACT can be and ought to be, whether you are in a catholic school, a selective private school or in a public school, a place of ambition for our kids to do well, to do fantastically, and yet, if they are in an ACT public school right now, too many students have been dealing with extensive disruption.

This has been going on for a pretty long time. In my first speech in this place, I talked about the long tail impact of COVID. When I made those comments, I was envisioning that, probably over time, there will continue to be some impact on our students from the disruption that had been experienced and the limited number of face-time hours that students received during that period. What I did not anticipate is that those disruptions and the class splitting and, indeed, the days when students would not even be taught on campus would extend so far into the future. Every day that a child experiences that sort of disruption impacts them for life. There is simply no catching up on far too many of the issues. If a student misses a day, that day is gone. If a student is impacted by a split class that they were not expecting, it disrupts learning of the subjects, and whatever that day was going to bring is gone, and that impact will stay with those children for a very long time. So it is critical that we make sure that our educators do not need to take strike action.

I will not stand here and applaud the strike action that the minister seems to revel in, because it is costing our kids the time that they should be learning. But I will acknowledge the views of the unions, the views of educators, the views of parents—everyone who says that things have reached breaking point and it cannot continue. It cannot continue, because our teachers cannot continue working under many of the conditions that they are experiencing. It cannot continue, because parents and children should not have to put up with the long-term impacts that every disruption brings. We cannot educate without educators. We need teachers in our schools, and that means genuine negotiation and genuine discussion.

Those on the government side seem to fundamentally misunderstand or are willing to misrepresent a Liberal perspective to you. Mr Assistant Speaker Mr Werner-Gibbins,

you were talking about Sir Robert Menzies' view in your speech, and you mentioned the idea that Mr Menzies presented—that a court should be able to declare some strikes illegal. That is a reform that has happened. That is the context that we are working within. We are working within the context of protected action, where things have degraded so far that it has become intractable and teachers feel that, for their own wellbeing and for that of their students, they had to take this action. On this side of the chamber, we will always engage productively with anyone willing to engage with us productively. That is the attitude that we bring. We can collaborate. Negotiations do not have to be deeply and fundamentally adversarial on every occasion. We actually have shared objectives with the teachers, the unions, the students and the parents.

We need to get kids in school and learning—learning to the best of their ability—and we need to make sure teachers are not fundamentally weighed down by every burden that this government inflicts upon them to the point that they are unable to deliver for our kids. It seems pretty straightforward to me that the motion that Ms Lee has brought forward, commendably, should not have generated this much discussion, because it is so straightforward and so obvious that it should be supported. I commend Ms Lee's motion to the Assembly.

MS LEE (Kurrajong) (4.13): In addressing Miss Nuttall's amendment and in closing, I thank all members for their contributions to this debate. What was clear and common across everyone's contribution is that this is an important issue and it deserves discussion in this chamber. Miss Nuttall brought forward an amendment that the Canberra Liberals will be supporting. We have had discussions about that amendment and we have both contributed to it. I appreciate the discussions that we have been able to have.

In Miss Nuttall's contribution, she outlined just some of the log of claims that have been put forward by the union and have been with the minister and her directorate for many months. As Miss Nuttall has already indicated, these are not radical logs of claims; they are talking about things like recognition of experience and they are talking about more support for students with additional needs. These are not radical claims that the union is seeking. To have the Education Directorate, the education minister and every other minister who has a responsibility in this space not putting forward a genuine offer and not responding genuinely after 10 months of good-faith negotiations is unacceptable.

There are a couple of things that I want to address that were raised in contributions by some members of the opposite side. The education minister says that I have it wrong. She says that negotiations are continuing and they have not ceased, but that is cold comfort to teachers who have been negotiating for over nine months and have had meetings cancelled. It is all good to say, "Hey, we're meeting with them all the time and we have a meeting set up," but, when they are cancelled on numerous occasions and when they are cancelled at the last minute, that provides cold comfort.

Leaving aside the condescending nature of you guys on that side—I know that you are new to workers' rights, so I am leaving that to one side—through you, Mr Assistant Speaker, Minister, tell me this: you have indicated that you are a very proud product of the union movement, and that is well-known, so, if you are still a member of the union which is actively engaging in this type of action, would it be acceptable to you to wait for over nine months for a genuine response from an employer to a log of claims that,

as we have all discussed, are not radical? Is that okay? Is it acceptable, because, as you say, things are complex? Is that acceptable to you?

Imagine this was happening with any other employer. Imagine this was the same situation but we were talking about non-government schools. Would you stand in this place and say, “Things are complex, so it’s more than okay for it to take more than nine months to provide a response”? Imagine this was any other employee-employer relationship. Is that okay? I think we all know what the answer would be. It goes to show that this minister is still not taking things seriously. The only constant commentary that we have heard from this minister is along the lines of: “I’m really proud of the union movement for this industrial action,” or “Hey, Canberra Liberals—what—you’re standing up with the union?” That is all we have heard. It once again demonstrates that she does not take this seriously.

Let’s go to the first point: “I’m really proud of the industrial action taken by the union.” This is downright delusional. We are talking about industrial action that has caused significant distress, not only to teachers and school assistants but also to students and families. In question time today, the minister stood in this place and talked about how proud she was that the union should be at such a turn-up at Ainslie Football Club during school hours, when her directorate was forced to close schools because she failed to deliver any results to the union and they were taking two-hours of stop-work action. She was proud. This is from the Minister for Education and Early Childhood during the time when parents had to scramble, students missed out on hours of learning, and teachers, as Miss Nuttall pointed out, had to arrange their own child care, because they were forced to take that action. This is extraordinary.

Ms Stephen-Smith talked about the process. It is cold comfort to say, “It’s all been streamlined. It’s been great.” If it has been streamlined and it takes 10 months and there is still no response, what was it like before? This is cold comfort to the teachers who have been negotiating in good faith and were forced to take industrial action.

As we always do, we save the best for last. Mr Assistant Speaker Mr Werner-Gibbings, there was your contribution to this debate. Leaving aside the outlandishly immature, attention-grabbing and student-political contribution, you went to great lengths to criticise my motion, hiding behind your dad to do it too. You went to great lengths to criticise the motion. You called it superficial. I hope that is the kind of feedback that you will give directly to the AEU, given that I engaged and consulted with them every step of the way when drafting this motion. You may wish to give that feedback directly to ACT parents whom I engaged with and consulted with every step of the way when drafting this motion. Given that you were really happy to tell us what you think I should have put in the motion, where is your amendment? Where is the amendment that you could bring forward? You have every right in this place to bring forward an amendment. If you think that you can make the motion better, you have every right to bring forward an amendment.

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER (Mr Werner-Gibbings): And we do.

MS LEE: Have you circulated it? Have I missed it? Did the attendant circulate an amendment? Have you moved one? Given how strong your criticism of this motion was, I look forward to seeing you vote against it, otherwise your words are utterly

hollow. I look forward to seeing you vote against this motion that you criticised so strongly.

Ms Berry: Mr Assistant Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I seek your advice. Given you were previously speaking on this motion, but she is directing her issues to you in your role as Assistant Speaker, is it appropriate or parliamentary? You might have to find out. I find it unusual that a member in this place would have a go at the Assistant Speaker, Speaker or Deputy Speaker while they are in the chair about something they were speaking about previously. I am seeking your advice on that.

Mr Parton: Mr Assistant Speaker, on the point of order: Ms Berry has been in this place long enough to know that the standing orders are such that we must direct our remarks through the Speaker. Additionally, because of the small size of this chamber and the fact that people are multitasking, there are going to be circumstances when there is a Speaker sitting in the chair during a debate that he or she participated in. I cannot see that there is a point of order.

Mr Cain: Further on the point of order, while you are exploring this with the Speaker, you might like to get the Speaker to check how often Ms Berry has done this very same thing.

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Thank you very much. I do not think there is a point of order. I understand where you are coming from with your question, but we will carry on. I will raise it with the Speaker, though.

MS LEE: Given that the clock was not stopped, I only have a short amount of time. The point that I am trying to make is this: it is easy to come into this place and have a go at the way that a motion might be written, but, without acting on it, it is superficial. That is the definition of “superficial”. The fact is that I brought this motion forward because I was forced to. We have the union, which is at breaking point, representing teachers who are at breaking point. I brought forward this motion. Ms Berry has already confirmed that she will be supporting it, and then to have the contributions that we have had smacks of: “I feel bad because I didn’t do it in the first place.” That is what we are talking about.

I thank members for their contributions. We will be supporting the amendment.

Amendment agreed to.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Light rail—expansion

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (4.24): Together with Ms Clay, I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) in the wake of the fuel supply shock caused by the USA’s illegal war in Iran, Canberrans are looking to the Government for expanded investment

- in public transport services;
- (b) Infrastructure Australia identifies “Canberra public transport improvements” on its infrastructure priority list, recognising that “without expansion of high capacity public transport along key corridors, increasing congestion will constrain productivity, limit access to jobs and services, and increase greenhouse gas emissions”;
 - (c) Infrastructure Australia’s listing includes an image depicting an approximation of the Light Rail Masterplan, lists investment timing as sitting within the two-to-four year pipeline and indicates that the next steps are for the proponent (the ACT Government) to develop potential investment options;
 - (d) the original vision for light rail in the ACT was to:
 - (i) deliver a new stage of the network every five years;
 - (ii) operate on a continuous-build model to attract and retain a workforce capable of delivering the masterplan in an effective and efficient way; and
 - (iii) anchor development opportunities within the existing urban footprint of the Territory using the promise of reliable and permanent mass transit systems along key corridors; and
 - (e) Light Rail Stage 1 from Civic to Gungahlin has been highly successful and popular and Stage 2A from Civic to Commonwealth Park promises to extend its utility;
- (2) further notes that:
- (a) progress on planning Stage 2B from Commonwealth Park to the Woden Valley has been challenging, for reasons including:
 - (i) the disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic;
 - (ii) additional approval requirements associated with development on National Land; and
 - (iii) National Capital Authority works on Commonwealth Avenue Bridge; and
 - (b) even after accounting for these delays, Canberrans have been frustrated by the slow pace of progress;
- (3) calls on the Government to:
- (a) progress work on planning for Light Rail Stage 2B so as to ensure the submission of a Works Approval Application to the National Capital Authority before the end of the 2027 calendar year;
 - (b) include the Mawson extension in the plans for Stage 2B in the interests of fully servicing the Woden Valley and avoiding additional disruption to the Woden Town Centre during future works to construct Stage 4 to Lanyon;
 - (c) commence feasibility study work for Stage 3, representing the route from Brindabella Business Park to Kippax;
 - (d) commence funding for construction of the promised Belconnen Transitway in 2026-2027;
 - (e) plan for a simultaneous expansion of the ACT’s fleet of electric buses, to grow the public transport network around the developing light rail

- routes;
- (f) apply to the Commonwealth for funding on all future steps in the development of public transport in the ACT; and
 - (g) report back to the Assembly on progress against these objectives by the first sitting day in December of both 2026 and 2027; and
- (4) further calls on Members to sign House of Representatives e-petition No. EN9851 on Support for Light Rail in Canberra.

We have all had the conversations with constituents, some of us many times over. They go along these lines: “I’d love to use public transport. The problem is it doesn’t come near me.” “It takes too long.” “The timing doesn’t work.” One particularly pertinent point for north-siders is, “The light rail doesn’t go to the national triangle, where I work.” These conversations tell us two things: firstly, that our public transport system does not meet people’s needs; and, secondly, that they wish it did.

It is a conversation that I have been having more frequently since the Strait of Hormuz has been blocked and our supply of fuel has been impacted. The fuel supply shock has brought into sharp focus people’s dependence on fossil fuels, which in most circumstances relates to their need for a private motor vehicle. It has been getting all of us thinking about how we can reduce that dependence.

Last fortnight, we talked about electrification. Today, we are going to talk about public transport planning. It is a perennial topic that does not go away. We all have something to say about it, and we have fought several election campaigns over this very issue. It is, indeed, the fight between light rail and more buses. The message I come with today is that I want to be very clear: it is not a case of either-or; it has to be both, and it is worth reflecting on why.

I will let Ms Clay talk about the history of bus numbers in the ACT. The historical and political lesson that I want to talk about is from 1989. I am not sure who here was alive or a resident in the ACT in 1989; but, to set some context, the ACT had just achieved self-government, Madonna’s *Like a Prayer* was everywhere and *The Simpsons* was just getting started. It was also the time when we had the 1989 light rail proposal from Civic to the then planned new district of Gungahlin—the first district to be planned, designed and constructed since self-government.

The proposal was for an urban village, with residents residing within 600 metres of light rail stops, to service the growing population there. The cost of construction of the track was estimated at \$86 million at the time. They even transported a Melbourne tram all the way up to Canberra, plonked it down in the middle of Civic, and put “Gungahlin” on its destination sign. I can share a photo with members, if they want to see it.

What happened? The Carnell Liberal government is what happened. On coming to power, they killed the proposal, utilising arguments that I predict Mr Parton will be repeating very shortly. But here is the historical and political lesson from this: you cannot develop an entire district, with a forecast population of 120,000 people, with no significant anchor employer, and expect them to move around the city on substandard transport infrastructure for long without complaints. And complain they did, until the ACT government was forced, by the increasing electoral power of that expanding

population, to retrofit transport infrastructure to service this population.

The then Stanhope government were left with no choice but to build the Gungahlin Drive extension, one lane at a time, because that is how they did construction back then. They bulldozed the O'Connor Ridge, ignored strident protests, and spent \$168 million as at around 2011.

Finally, in the face of a packed Northbourne Avenue which could not take any further traffic or buses, the ACT government went ahead and built light rail stage 1. It opened in 2019 at a total cost of \$675 million for construction and 20 years of operations and maintenance. The lesson is this: with proper transport planning, you can provide transport infrastructure in a cost-efficient manner, rather than dribbling out expensive projects over a protracted period of time. Light rail is a critical component of this.

With light rail, major arterial transport routes are able to operate effectively and can be scaled for increasing capacity over time along a fixed route. This frees up the many buses currently dedicated to the rapid network to extend throughout the rest of the city for local routes and school runs, enhancing the frequency, accessibility and utility of our bus network.

Planning for light rail in the 2010s was visionary and inspirational. Those working on the project under Simon Corbell and Shane Rattenbury understood what was truly required in both ambition and scope, and some recent releases from the 10-year-old cabinet archives are evidencing that history. One such document is an early draft of the 2015 Light Rail Master Plan. It showed a comprehensive network, with connections reaching out to Kippax, Fyshwick and all the way down to Lanyon. An indicative timeframe was also included for each corridor, starting with the committed Gungahlin to city corridor. In the five- to 10-year horizon there were Russell, Fyshwick and Mawson. After 10 years it would go to Kippax, Tuggeranong and the Airport. After 20 years, it would go to Lanyon, the Molonglo Valley and a barely talked about line between Gungahlin to Molonglo via Belconnen. There would be at least one stage every five years. The vision was there. But then the vision began to fade. The vision began to be contained.

Even as early as 2015, Erindale and Lanyon disappeared from the finalised master plan. The Russell extension was considered but found to be too hard. An obstructionist commonwealth minister by the name of Zed Seselja slowed down engagement on early planning for stage 2. COVID hit, disrupting everything. Work resumed, but now with a need to work around the commonwealth's plans for bridge renewal. Subsequent publications have seen Kippax and Fyshwick also disappear off the maps for future plans. The line to Mawson contracted back to Phillip. Plans were made to refurbish Athllon Drive without building the planned light rail to Tuggeranong at the same time.

What was once one stage every five years has been slipping to one stage every decade, and now one stage every "whenever". What that means for our bus network is that it is back to just keeping up with the scale of the problem, which is servicing an expanding population and city, and the debate has regressed from an "and" to an "or". Labor have fallen back into their old habits of just fiddling around the edges. A shift in mindset is desperately needed.

This motion today effectively calls for that shift in mindset, and it is an invitation for members here to make it so. The Greens' calls today, in order and with some alliteration, are, firstly, to get us towards a works approval application at the NCA for light rail stage 2B as quickly as we can. I have specified 18 months in this motion, and even that does not seem to be achievable, according to the amendments that we are seeing from the government.

I am not sure people realise that, until this works approval application happens, the NCA will not presume that we definitely want this project to proceed. This is their trigger for commencing their own public consultations at a commonwealth level. The environmental impact statement does need to come first; but, in answer to a question on notice received from Minister Steel on 4 May this year, he was unclear on whether a works approval application would be lodged before the next territory election in 2028. To be blunt, if we cannot get a works application submitted this term, construction will not start until the next decade.

The second call is to restore the original vision for the Woden Valley and run stage 2B down to Mawson, to properly service the whole of the Woden Valley and avoid an additional wave of construction disruptions in Phillip, when the network proceeds in the direction of Lanyon. The third call is to get the planning for stage 3 started by kicking off the feasibility study work, and with a plan to go all the way to Kippax, servicing the full length of the Belconnen district. If you want the workforce retention benefits of a continuous build, planning for the next stage needs to start.

The fourth call is to make sure that the Belconnen transitway along Haydon Drive actually happens in the interim, to keep Canberra's busiest bus route running smoothly until light rail can arrive. There has been a concerning dearth of news from the government about this project, which they promised in the lead-up to the election to deliver in this term. This very project was the subject of a motion from Mr Parton and Ms Clay in the last term. If it is not in the upcoming budget, Labor will be breaking their election commitment.

The fifth call is to keep up with the electric bus acquisitions so that the bus network can genuinely expand as the light rail routes come online. The sixth call is to apply for all the commonwealth grants we can get. Infrastructure Australia already recognises this as a significant project which will reduce congestion and emissions and improve productivity. The commonwealth bureaucracy does not need much convincing at this point. With 80 per cent of our federal representatives being members of the Labor Party, it should not be difficult to convince the Treasurer, either.

Lastly—and I mentioned this in the last sitting—I have launched a petition to the House of Representatives. Stage 2B is significant, in that it will be subject to a vote of both houses of parliament. If we are to secure this project going through all of its federal approvals, we will want to be confident that the commonwealth will support it sooner rather than later.

I am calling on our federal representatives to voice their support and send the signal to the NCA that this project is the right and good thing to do. My petition will be all the more meaningful with more members of this Assembly behind it, so I ask members to join me in this regard. I commend this motion to the Assembly.

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (4.35): It was the summer of early 2023, coming up on 3½ years ago. One of my staff at the time—and a shout-out to Mav—made a discovery. He had got hold of some old ACTION bus reports from around the time of self-government. In it, we discovered that, back in 1990, ACTION had 479 buses in its fleet. By comparison, at that same time in 2023, the annual reports from Transport Canberra were telling us that the modern bus fleet had just 456 buses.

We were pretty gobsmacked by this. Our fleet had shrunk while our city had grown. The population had gone up by 174,000 residents, 61 per cent since 1990, and our geographic footprint had increased. We had sprawled a really long way. There were some changes in the bus fleet in that time. We now had some larger and articulated buses, and stage 1 of light rail had come online. But even with these factors, the gap was massive. We had fewer buses then than we had in the 90s. Not much has changed since then. We have around 450 buses today, still less than in 1990, the lowest level since 2018, and less than we had in 2023. Our fleet has shrunk again. We need a plan to fill the gap.

It leads us to a sad and inevitable conclusion. This planning work is simply not being done. We are planning new suburbs and new districts, but we are not properly growing the public transport network. So many people have made this point so many times in planning committee hearings—PTCBR, community groups, councils, members of the public, the Conservation Council, and so many more. They all point out that we need good public transport, and we need it when people move into a suburb, not decades later. Decades later, they have already formed their habits, they have already bought their cars, and they have already decided how to live their lives. We certainly do not need a government that is actually going backwards on a bus fleet.

This lack of fleet planning has meant that new services for the Molonglo Valley will have to come at the expense of other districts. It is why our R2 and R3 were cut, out in Belconnen. There were disruptions on Commonwealth Avenue Bridge. The ACT government saw that coming for years, but they did not have enough buses to cope with those disruptions without cutting both rapids from a region representing one-tenth of Canberra. And that is what happens when you push a network beyond its limits without proper investment. I am really glad that we are getting the R2 and R3 back. We are getting those back on 20 July. That is excellent, but they should not have been cut. There should not have been a need to cut those essential services.

I am also acutely aware that the reason those rapids are able to come back is because of the work that went into finding efficiencies in the network. It was not because we finally have enough buses and enough drivers.

The government is promising new rapid services this term out to Molonglo and Ginninderry, but I am honestly not sure how this will happen without substantial new investment in our whole system. I worry that the government have fallen into the trap of micromanaging the network we have, forever seeking tiny efficiencies that make minor, incremental improvements, and they have lost sight of the big picture of what we need for Canberra's future. We need light rail to be rolled out more quickly, just like stage 1 was, and we need more buses.

Public transport is essential infrastructure. It is part of our city's planning and development. It is part of our daily lives. It cannot be an afterthought. If you cannot do public transport, you cannot build a city. Some of the early work done on light rail was really good. Back in 2015, the people working on the master plans had excellent foresight. They knew that if we were to keep up with the city's needs, we would need to build a new stage every five years. If we did not, we would face compounding pressures from road congestion, and our city would continue to sprawl.

Back in 2015, we knew that, in about ten years time—around about now—we would need to be getting started on stage 3 to Belconnen and Kippax. The reality is now bearing itself out. Our roads are filling up and the rapid buses in peak hour are running short of seats. It is requiring expenditure on stopgap measures like the Belco busway. That is a piece of infrastructure I support, but I also wish it was not needed. By the way, if it is not in the budget next fortnight, Labor will have broken their election promise to get it built.

We had two parliamentary motions last term on this. My colleague Mr Braddock mentioned this; my colleague Mr Parton is well aware of this. He was there. It was the second one of his that actually passed, when government agreed to build that Belco busway. The Belco busway has been identified by Infrastructure Australia as a high-priority project since 2015.

It was such an obvious project to push ahead with that Mr Parton, in the Canberra Liberals, and I both brought motions forward, and both tried to get a commitment. Minister Cheyne ran sponsored ads boosting the Belco busway. All of parliament agreed in 2023 that government would build the Belco busway by 2027. If you think the Commonwealth Avenue Bridge is currently a bottleneck in our bus network, you have not seen Haydon Drive on a bad day. Around that area, during the morning peak, from what I can tell, it is the single biggest other source of delays for buses, and it ripples throughout the whole network—and it is getting busier over time.

If light rail to Belco is still 10 or 20 years away, bus priority measures are needed along that route now, and definitely before construction of the new northside hospital on the same road, which will add further complications and more congestion. The commonwealth has helped with some funding for planning the work on it, and that was due at the start of this year. We are still yet to see anything on it.

Realistically, the planning work for light rail stage 3 also needs to start now. It needed to start five years ago, but we cannot do anything about that. Getting the stage 3 planning with the early feasibility work started now is one of the calls in this Greens motion today. Stage 3 planning needs to happen. It needs to go to Kippax, and on the other end it needs to go all the way out to Brindabella Business Park. The ACT government may never have planned for that precinct—the federal government forced it on us—but now that it is there, it needs solid public transport connections.

Planning for stage 3 all the way out to Kippax will also help us with our urban infill targets. I have talked a lot about our need for city limits. Experience tells us, including here in Canberra with stage 1, that planned light rail anchors current and future development opportunities. It incentivises densification rather than sprawl. A denser population allows for the more efficient planning of government services, and it helps

achieve the critical mass to sustain business opportunities. Putting down mass transit lines reduces car dependency within the denser corridors and, in turn, it reduces the need for costly road duplications throughout our whole city, not to mention throughout the sprawling suburbs that would otherwise have to be built.

All these projects make economic sense. Public transport is essential public infrastructure. It needs to be planned; it needs to be built. If you do not plan it, you cannot build it, and you will feel the consequences later. Belconnen is already feeling these consequences now, in 2026.

Woden is feeling these consequences, too, and Tuggeranong is not far off. We need to get this moving. We need the light rail to be planned, and we need more buses—and we need these projects to be integrated. We need to know exactly where stage 3 is going to go, and we need to build our Belco busway.

Labor has been too timid so far. These projects are significant priorities identified by Infrastructure Australia. There is massive scope to get federal funding. We also cannot reduce our climate emissions if we do not back our public transport. Over 60 per cent of our climate emissions are coming from transport, and that is mostly coming from cars. We have to give people simple, easy-to-use alternatives. This is also the best way to help people with the cost of living and the fuel crisis. We have to give people a better alternative than being held hostage at the bowser, never knowing what price they will pay, and making them dependent on foreign fossil fuel.

Canberra needs better public transport. Get it moving.

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage and Minister for Transport) (4.44): I would like to thank Ms Clay and Mr Braddock for bringing today's motion to the Assembly and for acknowledging the success and popularity of light rail stage 1 and the city-shaping benefits that mass transit brings to our city as a high-quality frequent service that has seen more people using public transport and has been a catalyst for sustainable transit-oriented development. Delivering an infrastructure project of this scale through the city centre and through a sensitive area like the Parliamentary Triangle requires significant planning and approvals. This project is subject to both Australian and ACT government environmental and planning approval processes, making it one of the most complex approvals processes for an infrastructure project ever delivered in the territory and probably Australia-wide as well.

While ACT Labor agrees with the principle of this motion to see light rail progress as quickly as possible, the arbitrary timelines proposed in this motion are not based in reality. We have always said that this project had a high level of planning risk but we would systematically work through all of the planning approvals required for light rail stage 2B. It is why we separated light rail stage two into 2A and 2B, recognising that stage 2B was complex and required additional approvals that would take a longer period of time to complete. We have also always stated that, because approvals that we are seeking are from third parties for stage 2B, we do not have direct control over the outcomes of those approvals or the exact timeframes for the delivery of those approvals.

The ACT government will continue to seek approvals, await the outcomes of each of

the stages and use those outcomes to inform the next stage of the approvals process required for the project. It is a responsible and realistic approach to the delivery of a complex project like light rail stage 2B, and it has been backed up with demonstrated progress against project milestones. We have made substantial progress on the environmental assessment required for this project through the preparation of a draft environmental impact statement, which was consulted on with the community, and now the preparation of a final EIS for the project due to be lodged with the commonwealth next month.

The ministerial statement that I gave in March last year provided an update on stage 2, including the timeline of the indicative phases and milestones for the project. Then, on 4 September 2025, I tabled a further update on light rail stage 2B which revised the indicative timeline for the environmental approvals phase to reflect the complexity of preparing an EIS that both satisfies the commonwealth and territory requirements and addresses the community feedback informed by the draft EIS process.

This timeline was further refined just last sitting week in the update I provided to the Assembly on approvals for the project, where I announced that the ACT government had confirmed the final alignment for light rail stage 2B, and updated the community that the final EIS is planned to be lodged with the Australian and ACT governments next month. A determination is expected to be made by the end of this year by DCCEEW; however, it cannot be guaranteed. The timing of the next stage is subject to a favourable determination on the EIS, any conditions attached to the environmental approval, and the extent of work required to respond to them. The government will then prepare for a submission through the NCA's works approval application process and also engage with the federal parliament, including the joint parliamentary committee. They may undertake their own process as well.

The government is not establishing an arbitrary timeframe that we cannot control. The government will continue to progress through each approvals stage for the project. Once we have completed all of the required environmental and planning approvals, understood the final scope of the project and mitigated the project planning risk, Infrastructure Canberra will prepare a business case for light rail stage 2B for the government to consider before making an investment decision. Mr Parton is giving us the chance to talk about that later stage of the project on Thursday, but what is relevant in terms of this motion is that the government has already committed to assess the viability and benefits of extending light rail to Mawson as part of the light rail stage 2B business case.

In relation to stage 3 of light rail, the ACT government continues to undertake long-term planning for the future light rail network to support Canberra's long-term growth, improving connectivity across the city and supporting improved land use benefits and encouraging mode shift. Work is underway by the City and Environment Directorate to develop a new Planning and Transport Strategy, an integrated strategy that will include light rail network planning as well as bus network planning for further stages over the coming decades. However, the government's priority is stage 2 of light rail. We are focused on delivering stage 2 not the delivery of stage 3, which is a longer-term infrastructure priority. We have to be realistic that it is not within the fiscal capacity of the territory to deliver stage 3 of light rail in the next decade, given that that is also the timeframe for the delivery of stage 2B and given the range of infrastructure projects

that the government has to build across health—new hospitals; education—new and upgraded schools; and a range of other critical infrastructure needs across government.

The feasibility, timing and strategic sequencing of stage 3 of light rail is intrinsically linked to the progression and ultimate delivery of stage 2B, including network integration, financing and the sequencing of other tier 1 infrastructure projects in the pipeline. In this context, undertaking detailed feasibility studies for stage 3 now, let alone ahead of planning work on stage 2B, does not represent an efficient or effective use of resources at this time. The government will continue to undertake strategic network planning and safeguard future light rail corridors as appropriate until there is greater certainty regarding the approval delivery pathway and expected timeline for light rail stage 2B.

The ACT government is committed to ensuring that the expansion of any public transport infrastructure, including major transport corridor upgrades, fully integrates and reflects a genuinely multimodal network to meet the needs of our diverse community. Transport Canberra actively provides advice to relevant projects and stakeholders to ensure that any future potential stages of the light rail network can be effectively retrofitted onto existing and planned transport infrastructure. This includes safeguarding corridors, aligning infrastructure design and ensuring that current investments do not preclude future mass transit expansion. Examples of this coordinated approach to maintain compatibility with potential future light rail corridors includes recent work on the Belconnen to city transitway feasibility study, which was an updated study. It is expected that detailed design on that project will support bus priority measures, with detailed design being undertaken in the 2026-27 financial year, which is again an update that is different to what is proposed in the motion.

As the ACT government invests in an efficient, integrated transport system to better connect Canberra's growing communities to housing, employment, facilities and services, we will continue to work in partnership with the commonwealth to secure funding for the delivery of these critical transport infrastructure projects across the territory. Investment priorities will be determined through a comprehensive assessment of needs across the entire transport network, ensuring that the proposed projects deliver the greatest possible benefit in terms of connectivity, efficiency and long-term sustainability. The viability of the delivery of stage 2B of light rail and future stages of light rail depends on joint commonwealth funding to get these projects underway. Funding for individual infrastructure projects will be actively pursued at appropriate stages of planning and development, aligning with national infrastructure priorities and commonwealth funding processes. We already have funding for stage 2B of light rail to undertake the planning and design work required to get the project through to business case stage. We have \$100 million joint funded by the commonwealth and the ACT government to progress stage 2 planning and design, and we are systematically working through the approvals required.

I am pleased that we have made significant progress through the environmental approvals process. I look forward to keeping members of the Assembly and the community updated on the timelines for the project as we work through each of those approvals and deliver light rail stage 2B and plan for further improvements to our integrated public transport system. I will be moving amendments to the motion that reflect those more realistic timeframes, including for the Belconnen transitway but also

for the timing of future approvals for light rail stage 2B, which I already set out to the Assembly earlier this term, acknowledging the work that we have already committed to do on the Mawson extension as part of the stage 2B business case and removing the section in relation to stage 3 of light rail—noting that we are undertaking planning work through the updated planning strategy and that we will consider that but it is not at the feasibility stage of that project. I seek leave to move my amendments together.

Leave granted.

MR STEEL: I move:

1. Omit paragraphs (3)(a) and (3)(b), substitute:

“(a) continue to progress planning approvals for Light Rail Stage 2B in line with Light Rail Stage 2—Update tabled by the Minister for Planning on 4 September 2025;

(b) assess the extension of light rail to Mawson as part of the Stage 2B business case;”.

2. Omit paragraph (3)(c).

3. Omit paragraph (3)(d), substitute:

“(c) commence detailed design for the Belconnen Transitway in 2026-2027;”.

MR PARTON (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (4.54): You know that you are in for a wild ride when you get a motion from the Greens that starts off with a statement about Trump’s illegal war in Iran. You know it is going to be a wild ride. When I started reading this, I kind of thought that there might have been a “calls on” for President Trump, but it turns out that is not the case—so maybe next sitting week.

It is interesting listening to Mr Steel. Often when I listen to Mr Steel, I arrive at the conclusion that we agree on a lot more stuff than people would think. We stand with Mr Steel, which is very rare, on the fact that we kind of agree with the vibe and we agree with the basic premise of this motion, but we are just not prepared to support things that we do not think can actually occur.

I heard Mr Braddock on ABC Radio on Monday morning spruiking this motion. I cannot remember whether it was him or Mr Solly who raised the Eslake report, but they spent a fair bit of time discussing the Eslake report and how it applies in this space. Mr Braddock and I must have read different reports, because the one he was discussing on the radio bears no resemblance to the one that I have seen—it just does not. So let’s talk about the Eslake report. Mr Eslake suggests that, despite the fact that our economy has performed relatively well, we have gone down the gurgler—not his words; I know it is paraphrasing, but that is pretty much it—on the debt front.

Mr Braddock: Point of order. The Leader of the Opposition is pre-empting the debate on his motion on Thursday, which I believe will cover this territory. So I am not sure why he is raising it in the context of this particular debate.

MR PARTON: On the point of order: I would say that the content of my discussion is extremely relevant to this motion, particularly given that Mr Braddock discussed this

motion on commercial radio and specifically discussed its linkage to this report.

MR SPEAKER: I will just get some advice. Mr Braddock is not really required to be compliant with standing orders when he is on radio, Mr Parton, but you are required to be compliant with standing orders when you are debating in here. So I ask you to be directly relevant to this motion.

MR PARTON: And indeed I will, Mr Speaker; thank you. The motion before us calls for a fair bit of spending, and spending obviously relates to the bottom line of the budget. Mr Speaker, I do not know whether you have seen a recent report pertaining to the budget—that being from Mr Eslake. He says that we are where we are entirely due to conscious decisions taken by the ACT government—not just mainly because of government stuff-ups, not just a little bit; our fiscal deterioration is entirely due to conscious decisions made by the ACT government. Although he does not mention it in the report, I would point out that the vast majority of those conscious decisions were made while the Greens were the tail wagging the dog.

I am not sure whether Mr Braddock got the same report as we did. Mr Eslake's report has called upon the government to adopt a more disciplined fiscal strategy. He points specifically towards a large number of capital initiatives entirely funded by debt which have also detracted from the overall cash balance. Mr Braddock has taken the Eslake report to mean that we should start shelling out more of taxpayer money on capital initiatives entirely funded by debt. Mr Eslake says we should rein it in. The Greens have taken that to mean that we need to dive further into debt. So their view is that we should speed up the delivery but also expand the project—"Let's just shell out and get it happening now and push it down to Mawson, because money is no object." That is pretty much why we are in opposition to this motion.

Mr Braddock was questioned on ABC Radio about this yesterday and Mr Solly said to him, "It is a great idea, but somebody has got to pay for it. How are we going to pay for it?" I think that is a relevant question. Mr Braddock, referring to the fairytale version of the Eslake report, told Mr Solly that Mr Eslake was actually directly advocating for this in his report because, according to Mr Braddock, the fiscal report clearly shows that we are spending way too much money on roads for evil petrol-powered car people and, needless to say, we need to stop families from driving cars, lay some more tram tracks—

Mr Braddock: Point of order, Mr Speaker. I have been misrepresented by the Leader of the Opposition. I did not say any words to the extent that he described me as saying.

MR SPEAKER: On the point of order, Mr Parton?

MR PARTON: Let me withdraw, Mr Speaker.

MR SPEAKER: You can, but ultimately I think this is a debating point. I think this is a rigorous debate. But you have withdrawn; so carry on.

MR PARTON: While we are spending \$6,000 million on the tram extension, this motion suggests that we should also be spending bucketloads of money on the credit card on a monumental expansion of the bus network. Again, if we could wave a magic

wand and get all that stuff to happen, yes, I would be cheering from the rooftops. I would probably be cheering from the stands of the new stadium that we built as well—because we might as well build that as well.

Let me be honest about the biggest reason that the tram to Woden has been delayed till at least 2034. Obviously, there are some planning problems and some complexities. Labor's tram position is not all that much different to ours. We love the tram. We love it. But, as per the warning from Saul Eslake, we cannot afford to build it tomorrow—we just cannot. The idea from the Greens that we can just have everything is the reason that we find ourselves in this position now. The world is far from perfect. I understand that the original plan for light rail was to deliver a new stage of the network every five years. I bag out the Chief Minister every week, because he suggested in 2019 that the tram would get to Woden by 2025—and that was never going to happen. I think the Chief Minister knew at the time it was not going to happen, but we were in an election campaign, and so that is what he said would happen.

I love how the Greens just tack on extras to everything. Stage 2B is to Woden but they say, “No; if you are going to go a further five billion into debt, why not make it six, and push it out to Mawson.” The government talks about stage 3 being from Civic to Belconnen, but not the Greens. They do not reckon it is Civic to Belconnen; they reckon it is Kippax to Brindabella Business Park. That is what they reckon—“It does not matter how much it costs; we are going to build it from Kippax to Brindabella Business Park, and we would like it next week; thank you.”

According to the Green, stage four of this project is not Woden to Tuggeranong. According to this motion, it is Woden to Lanyon. I say: why not push it out to Tharwa? When you consider the discussion that we have had about the road to Adaminaby—just saying—why don't we push it out to Adaminaby, because money is no object? This is fairytale stuff. This motion highlights why we as a territory are so far in debt. There is no way on God's earth that we can support it. I do not reckon we are backing Mr Steel on his amendments either.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (5.03): I thank Mr Braddock for bringing forward this motion today and all the members for their flavourful, colourful contributions to date. Among capital cities, Canberra is an outlier, sometimes for good reasons and at other times for less good reasons. Unlike so many other capitals, we lack a connected, functional, dynamic public transport system that provides connection across our city, including in increasingly densified areas.

Light rail, of course, has been central to the government's promise to start building such a system, which is why I support light rail in principle. It makes sense for the capital city of Australia to have an efficient rail network, one that serves the needs of our fast-growing community, a transport network that ensures people can easily access work, friends and family without needing a car and without contributing to road congestion.

Unlike other major cities, for some reason, building up a network has been a painstakingly slow-moving process, and we are really struggling to manage the costs of doing this. As has been repeated in the chamber quite a lot today, in reiterating this point in the wake of the Eslake report, government spending decisions have put us in a troublesome financial position. Future generations will be the ones that bear the costs

of these decisions. They will also suffer the consequences of our inability to deliver a basic, efficient public transport system that accommodates Canberra's population.

We already struggle with poor public transport and road congestion challenges. If the government cannot deliver light rail in a reasonable timeframe and on budget, we can only imagine what the commute of future generations will look like 30 years from now.

The point I want to make is that we need to be willing to have these honest conversations about costs, trade-offs and consequences, resisting the urge to form simplistic ideological positions that might be easier to communicate but do not actually reflect and respect the reality of the decisions that are being made, scrutinised and supported or opposed in this building.

We in this place also need to be willing to scrutinise infrastructure expenditure, including for projects we are inclined to support. We need to be willing to compare our options, scrutinise the processes and prioritise based on the long-term needs of our communities. We need to interrogate public spending choices and ensure that government investment matches community expectations.

My question to the government on all of this is: why is the affordability of a simple one-line tram in the nation's capital city even in dispute? Why is this such a big problem? Why is this something that the government is struggling to budget for, struggling to justify and struggling to deliver? Light rail can be a priority, but we as an Assembly should be asking why we seem to be struggling so much to afford what in many areas amounts to tracks and a median strip.

A robust transport system that accommodates our expanding population and ensures Canberra remains the world's most livable city should not be jeopardised by concerns that we cannot afford this. We should be able to afford a great light rail network. Indeed, we should be able to afford more than just a light rail spine, like other jurisdictions can, surely. If we cannot, we need to have an honest conversation about how and why the government's budget priorities and commitments have put us in this position. I note, as has been discussed, that we will return to this discussion, courtesy of Mr Parton's motion, later in the week.

What I am saying is that I empathise with the urgency around getting the light rail done and the frustration with how long it is taking to build the network. There is concern at the same time about increasing expenditure on infrastructure, of which the light rail is obviously a significant part; that is a serious, valid worry that risks putting the territory budget in an even more precarious position.

I support light rail. I use the light rail. I am looking forward to its expansion. But given that we apparently cannot afford to just do this, and do it quickly, I find it hard to support light rail unconditionally, to the potential detriment of the territory's financial sustainability and, therefore, to the potential detriment of many other projects and services that Canberrans need delivered.

In line with that, I am not entirely convinced that simply getting it done faster, as much as I am keen to see that happen, is actually the most sensible way forward at this point, especially when we have not seen the business case or costings for future stages,

especially when we have so many competing priorities to consider, and especially when it is unclear what other projects and priorities will not be delivered if light rail is prioritised unconditionally—and given, of course, that there are also commonwealth approvals outside the government’s control that will in part determine the timeline for this project and for future stages.

In line with this, I am happy to support Labor’s amendments to the original motion, although I will be closely monitoring to ensure that the environmental impact assessment process is not used as a kind of scapegoat for delay. On the face of them, Labor’s amendments do not seem particularly offensive to me. They demonstrate an ongoing commitment to the importance of this project, of light rail, without committing us all to supporting aspects of it when we do not yet have a sufficient level of detail to make informed choices—or, as much as I like a tight timeline to drive action, enforcing what might be unachievable deadlines that may not actually deliver quality outcomes from a transport, planning, environmental and budgetary perspective.

In relation to the other elements of the motion, just briefly, I am pleased to see the Greens’ calls for a greater level of investment from the commonwealth, calling for the ongoing electrification of our bus fleet, the prospect of better connections between Belconnen and the rest of Canberra, and I am happy to lend my voice to the petition, as has been requested.

I hope to see the light rail project carried out in a way that is responsive to the need across our community for better public transport, while also managing the project at each stage of it appropriately, in the context of the financial environment we are in here in the ACT.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (5.09): The Greens will not be supporting Minister Steel’s amendments. They water down this motion in a way that misses the point that we are trying to make. I am not looking for a restatement of existing government talking points. I am looking for action. The government’s unwillingness to progress to a works approval by the end of 2027 tells me that either they are not taking this project seriously or they do not understand how critical getting this done in a timely manner is to the success of the project.

In 2018, the commonwealth parliament’s Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories held an inquiry into light rail stage 2 approval processes. The National Capital Authority submitted on the flow of its processes. I have here a copy of that flowchart. I seek leave to table it.

Leave granted.

MR BRADDOCK: I present the following paper:

Commonwealth approval processes—Copy of a chart, National Capital Authority, Submission 22, undated.

After a works approval application is submitted to the NCA, the NCA will commence public consultation on the proposal. They will then make an assessment and refer it to the minister for decision. The minister will then refer it to the aforementioned joint

standing committee, who will conduct their own inquiry and inevitably make a range of findings and recommendations to be taken into account. A revised works application will probably need to be lodged. Only then does the question of approval go to the commonwealth parliament, where it must be voted on by both houses.

The ACT government needs to respect the fact that these commonwealth processes will not proceed quickly, and consultation that both the NCA and the joint standing committee will want to undertake will not be expedited or bypassed. That will probably take over a year. Until you first lodge a works approval application, these processes do not start. If the government want to be making final investment decisions in late 2028 to early 2029, they cannot afford to drag the chain on this essential step by any longer than the end of 2027.

I worry that the government does not get this. The go-slow on stage 2 is, and has been, phenomenal. That includes Mawson—and never mind that, in the original 2015 network planning, it was clear that Mawson would need to be part of this connection. There are substantial decisions to be made about the southern gateway, and the future of light rail to Mawson is an important part of that. These decisions cannot be pushed back and need to be made and, until they are made, the Woden Valley will be living with that uncertainty.

Then there is stage 3. The minister is saying that the focus is on stage 2B. Come on! Can't the government actually walk and chew gum at the same time? At the moment it looks like they cannot. There is so much work that can and should be done to plan for stage 3—even the most basic planning work, such as mapping out a possible route and identifying the engineering challenges that will need to be dealt with. I refer, for example, to how best to get around Black Mountain. But no; this government are not prepared to think about it.

I could talk more about some of the points made by Mr Parton—who, unfortunately, is no longer in the chamber—to educate him on the Saul Eslake report and some of the connections there. I will talk about another couple of points. This motion is merely calling for progression through the approval stages. It is not suggesting that we skip the business case stage. It is not suggesting that we proceed regardless of the cost or any consequences. People are reading the motion and seeing things that do not exist. I encourage people to actually read the motion, in terms of what it calls for.

The motion calls for putting in a works approval application in a timely fashion, so that we can ensure that this project is actually completed sometime in the near future. It calls for a feasibility study. These are not massive commitments. They call for us just to get moving on this project, and that is why this is so important.

Amendments negatived.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (5.13): I rise to speak on this motion and bring forward my amendment regarding the future of public transport in the ACT—public transport that I believe reflects what our community needs right now.

I support investment in public transport. I support faster journeys, greater reliability and a network that works for people across Canberra, particularly for those in the south,

who depend on efficient access to the city. But we need to focus on what will make the biggest difference right now.

That is why I am putting forward a simple, practical amendment to plan dedicated bus lanes along the Cotter Road and between Woden and the city, including on the Commonwealth Avenue Bridge, once the bridge strengthening is complete; and, in the short term, to work with the National Capital Authority to extend the northbound bus lane from Coronation Drive to Albert Hall. This matters because, in the short term, bus priority benefits every south-sider. It is not limited to one corridor or one future stage; it improves journeys for people from Woden, Weston Creek, Molonglo, inner south and Tuggeranong. Every south-sider travelling to the city should have seamless services.

Dedicated bus lanes will deliver faster journey times into the city, provide more reliable services protected from congestion, reduce the need for multiple transfers, making trips simpler, and make public transport a genuinely more attractive option for daily travel. That is what people care about—the door-to-door journey.

Public transport is about services. It is about whether someone can leave their home, get on a bus and arrive at work on time, without delay or complexity. We know that this works. We have seen it on high-frequency routes like the R2 and the R3, where reliability and directness drive patronage. Extending bus priority into the Woden to city corridor builds on that success and strengthens the entire network.

This is not about abandoning long-term plans for rail; it is about sequencing them properly. We can and should have a conversation about light rail, about densification, about city shaping and long-term investment; but, right now, we have an opportunity to make a meaningful difference to people's lives every single day by improving how the existing network operates. This amendment puts that practical outcome first. It ensures that investment in public transport is not just aspirational but immediate, visible and effective.

Turning to light rail, we are told that light rail is a city-shaping project, designed to drive densification along transport corridors and respond to our housing needs. If that is the objective, that is a serious conversation to have, but this motion does not grapple with that. It does not explain how densification will occur along the Belconnen to Brindabella Park corridor. It does not outline what housing yield is expected, what the built form will look like or how communities will be affected. It does not propose the kind of integrated land use planning that we are seeing in the southern gateway. Instead, it moves straight to committing further planning expenditure.

That is why I say this motion is putting the cart before the horse. And we must be honest about the budget. The ACT is facing a challenging fiscal environment, alongside a cost-of-living crisis that is putting pressure on households and increasing demand for essential services. In that context, we have a responsibility to ensure that every dollar we spend delivers real value.

This amendment does exactly that. It focuses on cost-effective, high-impact improvement that can be delivered in stages—in the short term, extending the existing bus lane from Coronation Drive to Albert Hall, and planning for bus lanes on the Cotter Road and, when the Commonwealth Bridge is strengthened, including bus lanes

on Commonwealth Avenue, including the bridge. This is the kind of practical, disciplined approach that we should be taking.

To be clear, I am not opposing the long-term vision for an expanded light rail network, but we must sequence our decisions properly. We should deliver immediate service improvements through bus priority, integrate transport planning with housing and densification strategies, ensure that the network works as a whole, and make decisions that align with our budget reality. If we do that, we will build a public transport system that is not only ambitious but effective, affordable and responsive to the needs of Canberrans today.

For those reasons, I urge members to support this amendment that sequences public transport investment sensibly. I move:

After all text in paragraph (3)(h), insert:

“(h) plan dedicated bus lanes along the Cotter Road and between Woden and the City, including on Commonwealth Avenue once bridge strengthening is complete, and in the short-term work with the National Capital Authority to extend the northbound bus lane from Albert Hall to Coronation Drive; and”.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (5.18): The Greens will be supportive of Ms Carrick’s amendment. We appreciate her advocacy for public transport improvements on the south side, particularly along Cotter Road, which we know is extremely congested, coming from the Molonglo district—another newly established district struggling with transport connectivity. Who would have thunk?

I do have some questions in terms of how to plan for bus lanes, where they plan to duplicate stage 2B, and how that might work, but I do not think that is a reason to vote against this amendment. I particularly note the short-term work regarding how to improve bus connectivity going through the Albert Hall to Coronation Drive leg. That is something that is particularly pertinent, as we have seen the impacts of congestion there.

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage and Minister for Transport) (5.19): I thank Ms Carrick for moving this amendment. The government will not be supporting it, but I think the intent is good, and it will not stop further planning being undertaken in these areas. I cannot commit at this stage to dedicated bus lanes, particularly on either the Cotter Road or Commonwealth Avenue.

The government has been undertaking some transport studies on the Cotter Road, looking at bus priority improvements. There are bus jumps and the like on the Cotter Road. But if the assumption in this amendment is that a lane is removed in both directions on the Cotter Road, that would cause significant traffic problems on a road that is already seriously congested at peak times.

The government is doing further transport planning work, particularly on a new transport connection through the north of the Molonglo Valley, connecting John Gorton Drive through to Bindubi Street, which we expect will be a major public transport

connection for buses in the short term, and potentially for future light rail through to Molonglo. That may end up being the solution for Molonglo, noting that there are also buses to Weston Creek running on Cotter Road.

We have not ruled out further measures on the Cotter Road; but, given the recent experience and modelling undertaken on putting in an intersection on the Cotter Road, which has been proposed by LDK Amberfield, and the significant issues that have been presented through that modelling, I think we need to be very careful.

With Commonwealth Avenue, the solution there is light rail stage 2B. We are building infrastructure capacity on Commonwealth Avenue over the bridge through an inset bridge plan in stage 2B of light rail that would provide additional capacity of 2,400 trips per hour over the bridge—which is a major bottleneck in the city—to be able to move to the north and south of the city, in addition to Kings Avenue.

We have a transport solution on the table, through light rail stage 2B, that will provide that extra public transport capacity. An alternative was presented in relation to bus lanes on Commonwealth Avenue, on the existing bridges, which was presented in the Canberra Liberals alternative transport plan. I will not have a massive go at them over that. A couple of issues were raised. There is the congestion that would occur as a result of those lanes being removed for general traffic—not just on Commonwealth Avenue Bridge, by the way, but on Capital Circle. It would take Capital Circle down to one lane, which would cause broader, upstream traffic impacts in the inner south. Also, there would be an approvability problem. The NCA would find it very difficult to approve the removal of a lane for buses on Commonwealth Avenue.

There are real barriers there. I do not want to suggest that, by supporting this proposal, somehow we can go ahead and do this. We will look at what is possible on the Cotter Road, but there are real issues on Commonwealth Avenue. Some of those issues will be explored soon, through the southern gateway planning and design framework, when it is released for consultation. Further transport planning will be undertaken as part of that piece of work. We will be engaging with the issue. I appreciate the intent, but we cannot support this amendment today.

MR PARTON (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (5.23): Just briefly, I would love to support this. I would love to support this, I really would, because I think ambition is so desperately important in this space and I know that we all agree with that, we all agree with that, despite what I said earlier. I just do not want to sign up to something that is quite possibly impossible to achieve. As was mentioned by Mr Steel, we did go to the election in 2024, dare I mention it, with a really ambitious plan for buses along that corridor. I am not completely removed from the possibility that what you put here on this motion, Ms Carrick, could well be possible. It is going to take a lot of work and it is going to take a lot of changes. I cannot support the amendment, sorry.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (5.24), by leave: I would just like to add that if we can have a bus lane on one span of the bridge, we can have bus lanes when we have two spans and we have six lanes. The road is already there. When I talk to the NCA about the issue they say they just look after the bridge, talk to the ACT government because they look after public transport and what the public transport network will be. So who is responsible? Who do I talk to? It is not that hard to put bus lanes, and where

you cannot put them for example around—not State Circle but where the bus goes around Parliament House—okay, I can see that that is a bit tricky, trying to put a bus lane through there, so maybe you do not have one there—but it is not to say that we cannot have a bus lane that goes from Woden to the City. If we cannot do that it is really problematic for people that live in Weston Creek, Molonglo, Tuggeranong and the Inner South; the people that are not on the light rail corridor. What services will they get? How many times will they have to transfer? Those people really need a bus lane.

Amendment negatived.

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (5.26): This was a bit of a disappointing day. I want to go back to the original motion because a lot of people have spoken about issues that maybe are not in this motion. What this motion actually does is call on government to plan some things and give us a bit more certainty. We are asking for progression on planning for 2B. We are asking to include a Mawson extension in plans for 2B. We are asking for a feasibility study for stage 3. It is absolutely baffling to a lot of us out in Belconnen as to how we can have so much development going on with the University of Canberra, the hospital, and our rapidly growing region, and not have this basic planning work done, not to build it, just to know how everything fits in together. We just do not understand how this is the right way to proceed.

We are asking for a plan for our bus fleet, not for the funding for the buses, just what is the plan to grow that bus fleet so that I do not have to stand up here in another three years and talk about numbers that have once again gone backwards. We are asking for applications for commonwealth funding for all of this and reports back to the Assembly and for people to sign a petition. These are not big asks. The only really big ask in here in terms of a financial commitment is the one that was already made, which was for construction of the Belco busway. Obviously we are not getting that, but that is a pre-standing election commitment of the Labor Party and of the previous Assembly. So this is a bit of a disappointment.

I also want to talk about the difference between words and actions. We have a government that has a lot of the right goals. We have a great view about climate change. We have legislated really good targets. We have failed to meet them. We currently do not have an up-to-date climate strategy. It has lapsed. We have a government that understands the transport hierarchy. For anyone who does not know the transport hierarchy, it is really, really clear. The most important thing in the transport hierarchy is active transport, then public transport and then at the bottom you have cars and other things. But when you actually look at the amount of investment our government puts into the bits of that, it is flipped. The government spends the most on roads, mostly for private vehicles, and they spend the least as you go through.

We are not putting our dollars where our promises are. We need to be taking this seriously. I hear from the opposition their concerns about what we need to invest in and where the money will come from. I have not heard a lot of fear mongering about how much our roads are costing. Did you know, we are probably going to spend more than \$10 billion on roads in the next 20 years. We are probably going to spend more than \$25 billion on roads in the next 50 years. We are talking about where the investment should be put and how that aligns with the really careful priorities in terms of public transport and reducing congestion and meeting our climate goals and how we should

go about that. We are simply not doing it in the way that we say we will.

I want to talk briefly about the Eslake report. That Eslake report very clearly set out that we are spending more than our assessed need on roads and less on transport and active transport. I did ask the Minister for City and Government Services a question about this today and I got the most baffling answer. I said, "How is it that the state of ACT needs to spend more on roads because our distances are bigger apparently than other states like Western Australia and Queensland?" I will lodge a question on notice because the answer I got back was, "Canberra has bigger distances." I think that chart is actually comparing states and I am pretty sure that Western Australia and Queensland are more spread out than the ACT. So we obviously need to have a good conversation about that. I simply cannot understand that.

What we are asking for is for the government to actually make decisions based on the priorities they have previously committed to and based on the goals that they have set. We are clearly not going to get that agreement today, but I will continue to talk to my community about how we do it. We are quite worried, as well, in the Greens that we are wasting our investment by doing things twice. If we are not planning things like coordinating our Belco busway and stage 3 of light rail whilst we are doing development, if we do not even have our plans on paper, we may have to go back and do some of that work twice.

My colleague, Mr Braddock, has explained this over and over again. It is better to do it properly and to plan ahead and to do that work right from the beginning rather than have to go back and do it again. We have seen this in Canberra quite often, when the government fails to plan ahead they have to go back and retrofit in transport options after the fact and that is really expensive. We have seen it often. That kind of short-term planning is not good. So really what we want is a bit more commitment to planning and a bit more follow through on the goals that have already been set.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (5.31): In closing, Mr Speaker. I am glad you are back, Mr Parton, because of the points you raised in your response. I wanted to provide you with some clarity because obviously when you were looking through Mr Eslake's report you missed some of the points which I referred to. I will point you to page 68, charts 48 to 49. If you have a closer look at those, you will see the argument that has been made here. In terms of service of local provision for the ACT on transport, it is actually negative compared to the comparable jurisdictions, whereas the level of service provision for roads is 120 per cent the normal level of service provision.

So transport is not a low hanging fruit if we are looking for efficiencies in government expenditure. In fact, I would argue it is an area where service improvements demand some serious investment decisions and, as critical infrastructure, it is definitely worth investing in. Compare that to roads where, as Ms Clay has pointed out, we spend at least half a billion dollars on roads each and every year and, based on the charts, there is some room to do better in that space. The Auditor-General is also looking into road maintenance and how we do that. So we can look forward to his report and what improvements we can make in this space because we cannot continue that drain on the ACT government's budget.

The main point I want to make here is that public transport infrastructure spending

displaces road infrastructure spending and contains the spending needs for a whole range of other municipal services over the long term. Take for example Athllon Drive. It is earmarked for hosting a light rail route. Get the plans for light rail moving and we will be able to do what is needed in one project rather than two. That is particularly relevant to the northern section of Woden. It really does baffle me why the government is pushing ahead with that road project when there are massive, long-term efficiencies to be gained in doing it just once and doing it properly.

If you want to care about financial and fiscal sustainability, then you have to care about public transport and everything that goes with it. In Canberra, that means light rail. Mr Speaker, Labor's response to this motion today, coupled with the Liberals' continued philosophical opposition to light rail—at least they are being honest about it—leads us to a significant conclusion. There is only one party in this Assembly dedicated to the development of a city-wide rail network, and that is the Greens.

Mr Barr interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Chief Minister.

Question put:

That the motion be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 3

Andrew Braddock
Jo Clay
Laura Nuttall

Noes 20

Andrew Barr	Elizabeth Lee
Chiaka Barry	James Milligan
Yvette Berry	Suzanne Orr
Peter Cain	Mark Parton
Fiona Carrick	Marisa Paterson
Leanne Castley	Michael Pettersson
Tara Cheyne	Chris Steel
Ed Cocks	Rachel Stephen-Smith
Thomas Emerson	Caitlin Tough
Jeremy Hanson	Taimus Werner-Gibbings

Question resolved in the negative.

Papers

Motion to take note of papers

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

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

Active travel infrastructure—Belconnen—government response to resolution

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (5.39): I rise to speak to the government's response to Ms Clay's motion of 3 December last year. That motion called on the government to:

Consider what funds and work would be required to implement by 2030 the Government's Active Travel Plan 2024-30, and report how much funding has been allocated and spent per financial year in the City and Environment Directorate's annual reports.

The government's response to this call does not, in fact, show any consideration of what funds and work will be required to implement the plan out to 2030. This government does it a lot. They identify the problem, they create a plan to solve the problem, and then they neglect to actually cost and implement the solution to the problem. This is something community sector stakeholders have been complaining about to me about, that they are sick of glossy plans that sit on the shelf as an unfulfilled promise of a bygone era. If this is the government response that we are going to get—that the government does not have, and has never had, an estimate of how much it would cost to implement the Active Travel Plan—then why did Labor support the motion in the first place?

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (5.41): Just on that, we are really pleased to see the progress on the Kippax to Belco link and to see the consultation that is rolling out, but it is disappointing that the government is unable to work out how much it would cost to meet the need. We costed that at the last election. The Greens costed it based on the network plan, the kilometres involved in it and government figures provided to us. So we are not sure why it is a difficult thing to provide an overall estimate, and I would suggest it might help planning future budgets to actually have some of those figures and to have them in the public domain.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Statements by members

Mr Neale Daniher—tribute

MR BARR (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism and Trade) (5.41): I rise this evening to acknowledge the passing of Neale Daniher AO, the 2025 Australian of the Year, whose courage, resilience and advocacy inspired Australians from all walks of life. After a distinguished career playing and coaching in the AFL, Neale was diagnosed with motor neurone disease in 2013 and given little time to live. He chose to fight, not only for himself but for all the families confronting this devastating illness. Through FightMND and the AFL's Big Freeze, he transformed national awareness. The blue beanie became a symbol of hope and determination, helping to raise more than \$115 million for research and support. Neale showed us that resilience is not the absence of hardship, but the strength to meet it with courage, humour and purpose. I encourage Canberrans to honour his legacy by supporting Big Freeze 12 on 8 June, and on behalf of the ACT government, extend condolences to his family and loved ones.

Health—pollution by fuel-powered vehicles

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (5.43): I wanted to give a shout-out to the Australian

Electric Vehicle Association, who did a presentation last week on air pollution and its impact on human health. I was extremely alarmed by the fact it could cause such things, not just respiratory diseases, which I think we are all aware of, but it can also be related to diabetes, strokes, heart attacks, cardiovascular diseases, heart failures, premature birth and decreased birth weights. All of this results from the burning of fossil fuels in our cars, which is why it is so important to examine ways we can electrify our vehicle fleet as a population health measure.

What was particularly interesting was their campaign for turning off idling cars in the drop and go areas of school car park areas, because it has been shown that young children particularly are vulnerable to not just the particulates, but the nitrous oxides and other gases which are extremely harmful to people's health. So that was a very important and enlightening presentation by AEVA and I encourage them to keep up the good work and the advocacy in this space.

Disability—Hidden Disabilities Sunflower Scheme

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (5.44): I want to thank Mr James Dunn who is the Sunflower Ambassador for Australia and New Zealand—and no, it is not what it sounds like—particularly in my capacity as shadow minister for disability. The sunflower, and I am sure we all recognise the wonderful image of it, is bright, colourful and it brings a smile. Many people who live with a non-visible disability do not have a very apparent way of showing that they have an extra need and that is why the Hidden Disability Sunflower initiative has been established to help bring attention and improve understanding of those living with a non-visible disability.

Some of you would have seen a sunflower lanyard or pin on a person, which indicates they have a non-visible disability, which could be autism, chronic illness, hearing loss, anxiety, acquired brain injury and many other conditions that are not visibly apparent but affect their ability to live a full and satisfying life. Such people appreciate a bit of extra consideration, which is why airports have signed up and government departments have signed up, to give attention to a special need.

Adjournment

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

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

Mr Bill Aldcroft—tribute

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (5.45): I rise this evening to acknowledge the life of Mr William “Bill” Aldcroft, who died recently at the age of 103 after more than seven decades of service to community, country and those most in need. I acknowledge Bill's family members—some of whom are here today—and express my own and the Assembly's deepest condolences for their loss.

Bill's extraordinary life was one of courage, compassion and public service. Born in London, Bill joined the British Army in 1940 at just 17 years of age. He served with

the Parachute Regiment in North Africa, where he was wounded, before serving in Sicily, Italy and later at Arnhem, where he was again wounded and taken prisoner during one of the most difficult battles of the Second World War.

After the war, Bill worked throughout the Middle East and Africa before migrating to Australia from Egypt in 1952. Like so many of his generation, Bill helped build modern Australia. From 1953 to 1972 he served as an amenities officer on the Snowy Mountains Scheme, supporting workers and their families in isolated mountain communities by organising education, recreation and community services. Following the completion of the Snowy Scheme, Bill moved to Canberra and began another chapter of public service, working in welfare and corrective services.

From 1973 until his “retirement” in 1987, Bill worked with juvenile and adult offenders, families experiencing violence and breakdown and people struggling with addiction. He also contributed to early work addressing drug and alcohol abuse among young people and built strong partnerships with school counsellors across Canberra. This led Bill to help pioneer community-based alternatives to detention for young offenders and he played a leading role in the development of juvenile community work orders in the ACT.

His contribution to civic life in the ACT was immense. Bill was involved in the establishment of organisations that continue to serve the community today, including Karralika, Lifeline Canberra and Prisoners Aid ACT. He also served on the planning committee for Ainslie Village and helped found the Family Planning Association of the ACT, which later gave him life membership. As a Quaker, Bill carried throughout his life a profound belief in human dignity and social justice. That belief was reflected in his work supporting prisoners, former prisoners and their families.

After his formal retirement, he continued visiting courts, helping vulnerable people navigate the justice system and supporting families in crisis. One story captures Bill’s character particularly well. When he began work with the Court Assistance and Referral Service in 1988, there was no office space available for him in the Supreme Court building. Bill simply cleared out a broom cupboard, which became his working space for several years. Never desk-bound, however, Bill regularly visited families who had a loved one in jail, met offenders upon release and maintained contact with those in detention.

In 2001, Bill was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia in recognition of his service to the community. He was also nominated for an Order of the British Empire but declined this title. Bill was a member of the Australian Labor Party for many decades, having joined the Cooma branch in the early 1950s. He later became the first Canberran to be awarded life membership of the Labor Party—just ahead of Fred Daly. He remained a regular attendee at Canberra North sub-branch, and I am pleased to see other members in the gallery here today.

Bill Aldcroft leaves behind an extraordinary legacy of service and compassion. He devoted much of his life to supporting and uplifting people who are often overlooked in our society. It has been a privilege to celebrate Bill’s life today and to recognise the enormous contribution he made to our city. Once again, to his family and friends, our deepest sympathies. Thank you for sharing Bill with us and our community. Vale, Bill.

Mr Bill Aldcroft—tribute

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage and Minister for Transport) (5.50): I also rise this evening to pay tribute to William Aldcroft, also known as Bill. Bill was one of those people whose contribution to our community cannot be measured by titles or accolades alone, although he earned many of them. His passing has been deeply felt across Canberra. He was a man that was much admired, respected for his generosity, humility and unwavering support and commitment to helping people.

According to the Parachute Regimental Association and the Arnhem Fellowship, Bill was born in Lambeth in London in 1922. He left school at just 14-years-old and went on to enlist at a very young age in the East Surrey Regiment's 70th Young Soldiers Battalion in 1940 and later volunteered for airborne forces in 1942. Bill joined C Company's 2nd Parachute Battalion as reinforcements in January 1943, where he served in North Africa. His ship was torpedoed on his way to service and then he was engaged for six months in the Atlas Mountains in Tunisia, fighting a German parachute regiment. He was wounded from shrapnel from a mortar bomb in one of the last German paratrooper attacks on his position and as he recalled, he finished up in hospital but missed the victory parade in Tunis.

Following service in Italy and Sicily, Bill was part of the 1st British Airborne Division's assault to capture the Rhine crossings at Arnhem as part of Operation Market Garden and served as a member of No 9 Platoon C Company, which got cut off from the remainder of the battalion occupying houses close to the famous Arnhem Road Bridge. He was wounded in action for the second time and following his hospital being captured, spent a short time in a prisoner of war camp close to the Polish border before he was then sent to work in a railway workshop.

Those experiences no doubt shaped Bill, but they never hardened him. Instead they served to deepen his compassion and strengthen his belief in the importance of dignity, fairness and humanity. After the war, Bill left England. He travelled around the world, retraining as a marine engineer before taking a seaman's ticket to Australia in 1952. He helped to build Australia through the Snowy Hydro scheme. He volunteered, teaching English to migrant workers, helping new Australians find connection and opportunity in a new country, and that instinct to serve others became the defining feature of his life.

Following his move to Canberra, Bill became a tireless advocate for people who were often overlooked or forgotten. He spent decades supporting prisoners, former prisoners and vulnerable members of our community through Prisoners' Aid, an Official Visitor, and through advocacy for a more humane justice system in the ACT. He believed strongly in rehabilitation, keeping families connected and in treating people with dignity regardless of their circumstances. Bill understood that communities become stronger when we refuse to give up on people.

He helped to set up Ainslie Village, worked for Family Planning, volunteered for Lifeline and it is no surprise that he was recognised for his service to the community

with the Medal of the Order of Australia in 2001. But what always stood out about Bill was how modest he remained about everything that he achieved. He was never interested in recognition. He believed deeply in fairness, equality and collective responsibility. Bill was also a passionate and lifelong member of the Labor movement and a proud life member of the Australian Labor Party.

He represented the very best of Canberra—compassion, resilience, humility and service. His legacy will endure not only through the organisations and causes that he supported, but through the many people whose lives were changed because Bill Aldcroft cared enough to help. To his family and loved ones, Leonie and Alan, Bill and Lisa, Fiona and his grandchildren and friends who are all mourning his loss around Canberra, I again extend my deepest condolences on behalf of the ACT Labor government.

National Sorry Day

MR PARTON (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (5.54): I rise as Leader of the Opposition and shadow minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs to acknowledge that today is National Sorry Day. Today, as a nation we recognise the Stolen Generation: the Indigenous children who were forcibly removed from their families and communities from the early 1900s to the 1970s. The first Sorry Day was held in 1998, a year after the *Bringing them home* report was tabled in the federal parliament. I am saddened that the cultural division within our community is still all too present today. My view is that we cannot genuinely fix the problems of the present without accepting the truth of the past.

As many of you in this chamber know, in recent years I have gone through a process of research and self-discovery with regard to my Aboriginal ancestry. Although I choose not to identify as being Aboriginal, I am a descendant of the Noongar mob of Western Australia. My father Tom Parton was the son of Adeline Schnaars, who was the daughter of Elsie Ninnette, and through Elsie my bloodline goes back to the Bennells, the Cables and the Narkles.

When I went through the process of seeking this information from Aboriginal History WA, they sent me a cache of documents about my ancestors, including the one that I have in front of me. Who has ever seen *Rabbit-Proof Fence*? The girls who are the central characters of that movie were taken from their home and sent to the Moore River Native Settlement. I have a document in front of me pertaining to Kandi Bennell, who was my great-great-grandmother. It is a document from the minister charged with the administration of the Native Administration Act 1905 and it is to the Commissioner of Police about Kandi Bennell. It says, “You are required forthwith to arrest and apprehend Kandi Bennell and to move her to the Moore River Settlement.” Really? It is dated 18 May. I watched that movie again and thought: “Really? Why did we do this?”

Until I began that journey of self-discovery, I could not begin to comprehend the injustices that my ancestors faced. When I read through those documents, I find it really emotional. I mention my journey because I think it is really important to highlight that, until I was provided with the correct research, like a large number of Australians I just marched along blissfully unaware of the level of injustice that this country perpetrated on its First Nations people.

Sorry Day asks all Australians to acknowledge the mistreatment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, particularly the Stolen Generations whose lives have been blighted by past government policies of forced child removal and assimilation. As I learnt more about those who came before me, I came to learn that, when my Auntie Jean was born at Sister Kate's mission in Western Australia, my grandmother believed—I do not know whether she was right in believing it or not—that she had to flee and hide baby Jean with relatives in various parts of Western Australia so that the authorities would not track her down and take her away. She did so until such time as she married my grandfather. We need to ensure that truth-telling remains central to reconciliation efforts. It reminds us that historical injustice is still ongoing and is a source of trauma.

Thanks for your indulgence in this chamber today. I note that tomorrow is the first day of National Reconciliation Week. It is a time for all Australians to learn about our shared histories, cultures and achievement, and to explore how each of us can contribute to meaningful reconciliation. The theme for this year's Reconciliation Week is "All In". The theme is a call for all Australians to commit wholeheartedly to reconciliation every day. I wholeheartedly support that.

Legislative Assembly

MS LEE (Kurrajong) (5.59): Being shadow minister for education comes with a lot of privileges and a lot of benefits, and one of them is to visit schools. Last month, I had the great privilege of being invited by Mia's year 1 class to do a little presentation in relation to how my job has changed over the years. I attended and I had great pleasure in doing that. The toughest audience that I have faced is, of course, a group of six- and seven-year-olds, explaining what we do here in the ACT Legislative Assembly.

Mr Cain: A bit like this place!

MS LEE: That is right. First and foremost, I have to say that they were so engaged and it was a real pleasure to be there. Second, their behaviour was impeccable, and I think that we could all probably learn a bit from the year 1 cohort there. I spoke about what a privilege it is to be elected by your own community and to have a place in this chamber to vote and make decisions on their behalf. I spoke about the step-by-step process in which laws are created, and I spoke about the way that we engage with our community so that we are out there listening.

I also spoke about how our roles have changed and how the evolution of social media has changed the way that we communicate with people. I also spoke about the fact that we are now fortunate to see more women and more people of colour elected into all our parliaments and to see the diversity that our community represents. I also spoke about the incredible privilege of being able to make decisions and to create our community into a better place for them and their future. I also spoke about the fact that I have many bosses, including, of course, their parents.

It was a great pleasure a few weeks later to receive an envelope with a bundle of letters that were written by some of the year 1s. I want to read a few of them on to the record. "Dear Ms Lee, thank you for telling us about your work. I liked hearing that you have lots of bosses. It was so good hearing all about your work. It is interesting. It is so good.

I think you could be on TV. Thank you.” “Dear Ms Lee, thank you for telling us about your work. I liked the work you do. My favourite bit was learning about your job.” “Dear Ms Lee, thank you for telling us about your work, and thank you for helping Dickson.” “Dear Ms Lee, thank you for telling us about your work. It was amazing. That was great. I like it.” “Dear Ms Lee, thank you for telling us about your work. I liked you telling us about interesting parliament.” “Dear Ms Lee, thank you for telling us about your work. I liked when you showed us how laws are made.” “Dear Ms Lee, thank you for telling us about your work. I hope you are very good at your work. I liked everything.” “Dear Ms Lee, thank you for telling us about your work. I liked when you showed us your building and your work, and it was interesting.” “Dear Ms Lee, thank you for telling us about your job of laws of the ACT.” They are very clever, very engaged, and definitely leaders of the future.

It was all very special to be invited to do this presentation in front of the year 1 cohort, but, as many parents in this place would know, there is a special moment and a special pressure that is put on you when you are doing a presentation in front of your own child and their class. Of course, I wanted to make sure that I did not disappoint Mia. After my presentation, there was a very special moment when Mia caught my eye, gave me a very quiet and very subtle thumbs-up seal of approval. It was a moment that I will remember forever, especially given that I missed so many of those special moments during the last term whilst I was leader. As I said to the year 1 cohort, “The ACT Legislative Assembly is your parliament, and you are welcome there any time.”

ACT Law Society—Law Week

MS BARRY (Ginninderra) (6.03): I rise to celebrate Law Week this week. This year, 22 May to 29 May marks Law Week. It is a week to recognise the contributions of legal practitioners across the ACT and promote the values and service of the ACT legal profession. On Friday night, in the company of my colleague Mr Cain, we were delighted to attend the gala dinner and awards night at the National Museum, hosted by the ACT Law Society. It was a wonderful evening focused on celebrating the work of lawyers who have demonstrated excellence in the profession.

I want to use this opportunity to congratulate again the winners of the 2026 Law Week Service Awards. The winner of the President’s Award for Outstanding Service was Andrew Giddings. Service awards also went to Jo Twible for her contribution to the legal profession and the community, and Anna Anzani for her contribution to access to justice and legal empowerment. The Emerging Lawyer of the Year Award winners were Xiao Lin King and Caroline Doherty. I would also like to congratulate the lawyers who got certificates for 40 and 50 years of contributions to the legal profession.

I thank the ACT Law Society for putting together such a great event. This year’s focus on the Domestic Violence Crisis Service in the ACT was an opportunity to reflect on their work and to contribute to support their ongoing and endless contribution to our community. The support provided by DVCS is significant and deserves our unbounded respect.

Given the challenges that we face in the ACT, it is more important than ever that we promote and understand the roles of lawyers. We know that good policy is best informed by those who have relevant experience. Day-in and day-out lawyers across

Canberra work on implementing the laws that we make in this place. They are the people who are best suited to inform us on what needs to be done. They are the ones who are most credible when we consider practical operations of schemes that have a massive impact on people's lives and liberties. They are the ones who advocate for people on a daily basis—people who feel the weight of the world against them and people who are experiencing the worst times. When people are experiencing the worst times of their life, lawyers are the ones who carry the burden of a failing justice system and are the ones who are chronically under-resourced and staffed for some of the worst backlogs in the country. They are the ones who strive every day to improve access to justice for Canberrans and pick up the pace in a failing justice system that is not working as efficiently as it should. They are the ones who stand up when the government does not defend the values of the legal profession.

As I reflect on my career as a lawyer before entering this space, I am reminded of the difficult and often misrepresented role of lawyers, and I take this opportunity to celebrate Law Week and to thank them for the service they provide to our community.

Cost of living—period poverty

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (6.06): A couple of weeks ago, I had a year 10 student from Evelyn Scott School in Denman Prospect spend the week of 11 to 15 May in my office for a work experience opportunity. As I have done in the past, I gave Ellie the opportunity to write a speech about something that was important to her. I am going to read her speech as presented to me. I will paraphrase the first sentence to give it a time and place context. Ellie has asked me to speak about an issue that affects not only people in our beloved capital but also half the human population.

Ellie's speech reads:

Now, I know it sounds like an incredibly large problem, but I want the ACT to be the first one to solve it. What I'm speaking about is menstruation, specifically menstrual products. Menstruation is not a choice for the majority of the female population; it is a biological process that women have no control over. Imagine being told to buy pads, tampons, etc., just to manage something your body does naturally. While everyday costs rise, so does the financial burden on everyone, including these women, who, according to ABC News, will ultimately spend \$10,000 on sanitary products in their lifetimes. These products are treated as optional consumer items when they should be recognised as essential healthcare products.

One of the biggest problems around this topic is period poverty. Period poverty occurs when people can not afford adequate menstrual products. This affects students, low-income families, and homeless people. In a time when the cost of living continues to rise, these simple everyday necessities can turn into something you give up so you can afford rent or food. Not only might some women start to give up these products, but they might also resort to using them for too long. As I'm sure many of you know, there are risks associated with using tampons for an extended period of time; toxic shock syndrome is one of the problems that can be caused by this, and it can lead to rapid organ failure and death.

Some people may argue that making menstrual products free would cost too much for the government, but we would never expect people to pay to use toilet paper;

we provide soap, water, and hand sanitiser in public spaces, as they contribute to personal hygiene and health. The benefits of making these products free are enormous. Providing free period products would increase school attendance, workplace participation, and overall well-being. As the nation's capital, let us set an example for the rest of the country and take another step towards fairness and equality.

So much progress on this matter has been made around the world, as Scotland has become the first country to make Menstrual products free nationwide. What I'm proposing is free period products in every public bathroom across Canberra. Not only would this lift a weight off of every woman's shoulders, but it would encourage people to have open conversations about a topic that has been shunned by society.

At the end of the day, it's about dignity and what should be a basic human right, and I really hope the ACT takes this opportunity to lead by example and create a fairer future for everyone.

That was the speech from Ellie Maher, a year 10 student from Evelyn Scott School in Denman Prospect. I commend Ellie in a couple of other related ways. First, her speech has references and footnotes, so this is an extremely well-researched topic which she spent time working on during her time as a work experience student in my office. I commend Ellie for her diligence and her studiousness, and also being brave enough and bold enough to present something that was very important to her for me to speak on her behalf in this place. Even further, at the end of that work experience week, she presented a policy proposal to my team and me. This is someone who is perhaps going to have a bit of influence on our society in various roles. It is a policy proposal that advocates for more flexible school timetables in our schooling system.

Well done, Ellie, and thank you for your time with my office.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

The Assembly adjourned at 6.12 pm