



**DEBATES**  
OF THE  
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY  
FOR THE  
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

**DAILY HANSARD**

Edited proof transcript

11 June 2026

This is an **EDITED PROOF TRANSCRIPT** of proceedings that is subject to further checking. Members' suggested corrections for the official *Weekly Hansard* should be lodged in writing with the Hansard office no later than **Wednesday, 1 July 2026**.

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**Thursday, 11 June 2026**

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

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

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

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

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

## **Leave of absence**

Motion, by leave, (by **Miss Nuttall**) agreed to:

That leave of absence be granted to Mr Braddock for this sitting due to caregiving reasons.

## **Petitions**

*The following petitions were lodged for presentation:*

### **Canberra Health Services—staff uniforms—petition 43-26**

*By Mr Parton, from 2,634 residents:*

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

The following residents of the ACT draw the attention of the Assembly that;

1. There has been significant recent public and staff concern regarding Canberra Health Services' interpretation of uniform requirements, particularly following reports that so-called "fun scrubs" would no longer be permitted at Canberra's public hospitals;
2. Vibrant and patterned scrubs are increasingly common across healthcare settings in Australia and internationally, improving workplace morale, allowing staff to express individuality, and helping create a more welcoming and less intimidating environment for patients, particularly children and vulnerable patients;
3. Evidence from other Australian hospitals, including a survey at John Hunter Hospital, found that 74 per cent of parents believed fun scrubs reduced stress for their child during hospital visits, while 90 per cent of

staff reported improved nurse-patient relationships and positive patient interactions;

4. Recent communications to staff stated that “fun scrubs are not a part of the CHS uniform” and that “approved uniforms are provided at no cost and must be worn”, creating understandable uncertainty and concern among staff;
5. This messaging has caused frustration among healthcare workers at a time when workforce morale is already under considerable pressure; and
6. Canberra Health Services has since clarified that colourful or non-standard scrubs may continue to be worn where local approval arrangements are in place.

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

1. Amend or clarify Canberra Health Services’ uniform policy to explicitly permit the wearing of appropriate fun scrubs by nursing, midwifery and other clinical staff, subject to infection control, safety and professional standards;
2. Ensure any revised policy provides clear, Territory-wide guidance so staff are not subject to inconsistent interpretation or application across different hospitals, wards or clinical settings; and
3. Recognise the positive contribution fun scrubs make to patient experience, staff wellbeing and workplace culture, and support their continued use across ACT public health facilities.

*Pursuant to standing order 99A, the petition, having at least 500 signatories, was referred to the Standing Committee on Social Policy.*

### **Capital Football—Woden Valley Soccer Club—47-26**

*By Mr Steel, from 1,049 residents:*

#### **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: Woden Valley Soccer Club (WVSC) is Canberra’s largest junior football club, with over 1,600 registered players, and the highest female participation in the ACT.

Despite being one of the most successful junior girls Clubs in the U10s through to U13s, WVSC is not represented in the NPL Girls competition, the highest level offered in girl’s football in the ACT. This is limiting the pathways for girls at WVSC to play at the under 14, u16 and u18 levels. Instead, these girls have to move to other clubs to play football at the highest level of the game.

A decision by Capital Football is required for WVSC to be able to field teams in the NPL Girls competition and retain players at the Club. This decision is required as early as possible in 2026 to enable WVSC to prepare for participation in the NPL Girls competition in 2027.

Your petitioners, therefore, request the Assembly to call on the ACT Government to actively encourage Capital Football to support the inclusion of Woden Valley Soccer

Club girl's teams in the National Premier League (NPL) Girl's competition for the 2027 season.

*Pursuant to standing order 99A, the petition, having at least 500 signatories, was 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 ministers for response pursuant to standing order 100, the petitions were received.*

### **Motion to take note of petitions**

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

That the petitions so lodged be noted.

### **Capital Football—Woden Valley Soccer Club—47-26**

**MR STEEL** (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage and Minister for Transport) (10.02): I rise to speak to the petition of 1,053 people to the Assembly to call on the ACT government to actively encourage Capital Football to support the inclusion of Woden Valley Soccer Club girls teams in the National Premier League girls competition for the 2027 season.

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

Leave granted.

**MR STEEL:** I table the following out-of-order petition:

Petition which does not conform with the standing orders—Woden Valley Soccer Club girls teams—2027 National Premier League Girl's competition—Support for inclusion—Mr Steel (130 signatures).

I want to acknowledge players and managers from the club who have joined us here in the Assembly today. Mr Speaker, Woden Valley Soccer Club is Canberra's largest junior football club, with over 1,600 registered players and the highest female participation in the ACT. It has always been a club that supports the participation and belonging of all people at all levels of the game, and it is a club that gets in and supports Capital Football's programs and tournaments like Daughters & Dads and the hosting of the Kanga Cup.

But despite being one of the most successful junior girls clubs in the under 10s through to the under 13s, Woden Valley Soccer Club is not represented in the NPL's girls competition, the highest level offered in girls football in the ACT. This is limiting pathways for girls at Woden Valley Soccer Club to play at the under 14, under 16 and under 18 levels. Instead, these girls have to move to other clubs to play football at the highest level of the game.

Woden Valley Soccer Club has been prevented from seeking promotion to the National Premier League girls competition in 2027 due to a decision taken by Capital Football

and their board in November 2025 pausing promotion and relegation. I understand that, following this petition, Capital Football has now confirmed their position at its board meeting on 28 May 2026. I urge Capital Football and their board to reconsider this decision. Read the detailed submission put forward by Woden Valley Soccer Club and hold a face-to-face meeting and start engaging with what is the largest club in junior football in the ACT.

If relegating an existing NPL girls club is not an option to make way for Woden, Capital Football should make the same consistent decision for girls as they did recently for the NPL boys competition, which was to expand the competition to include more teams. This is about inclusion and fairness. It is about Capital Football getting the basics right and backing the club that supports them and the grassroots on the south side. I urge Capital Football to support pathways for girls in football at Woden Valley Soccer Club, and I commend the petition to the Assembly.

**DR PATERSON** (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services, Minister for Women, Minister for the Prevention of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence, Minister for Corrections and Minister for Gaming Reform) (10.04): I rise to speak to this petition as Minister for Women, and, more importantly, as the principle of this petition represents gender equality in sport for girls in Canberra. This petition calls on Capital Football to support the inclusion of the Woden Valley Soccer Club girls teams in the National Premier League girls competition for the 2027 season.

At first glance, this may seem like just a local football issue. It is not. It is a clear question of whether girls are being afforded the same opportunities, pathways and support as boys. Woden Valley Soccer Club is the largest junior football club in Canberra, with over 1,600 players and the highest female participation in the ACT. It is a leader in developing girls football at the grassroots level with the strong and successful teams at the younger age groups. And yet despite this, there is no pathway within the club to the highest level of competition for girls. This is inequality. Boys in equivalent teams can see and access a clear pathway through to elite competition. Girls at Woden cannot. Instead, they are required to leave their club and leave their community to continue progressing. This is a clear and obvious structural barrier.

Gender equity in sport is not just about getting girls onto the field. It is about ensuring that they can stay, develop and succeed on equal terms. If we accept a system where the largest female participation base in the territory does not translate to elite opportunities, then we are sending the wrong message to young women—that their commitment is not valued or supported and progression is conditional.

The petition is clear. It highlights that a timely decision is needed in 2026 to allow preparation for the 2027 season. I, like Minister Steel, am calling on Capital Football to reconsider this decision. I have an 11-year-old girl who is a dedicated soccer player as well. She plays for an opposing team, though. She has played for the same team at the Murrumbidgee club for the last six or seven years, and I understand how important this game is, the team is, the club is and the progression year on year is.

This petition is about aligning our sporting systems with our values as a community and, ultimately, it is about ensuring that girls in Murrumbidgee can see a pathway for the sport they love from grassroots to elite, without having to leave the club that

supported them in the first place.

Mr Speaker, you cannot be what you cannot see. We want to see girls across Canberra aspire to be the next Michelle Heyman and all our other wonderful Matildas players. Equality in sport must be practical and actual, not just aspirational. I commend the petition to the Assembly.

**MS CARRICK** (Murrumbidgee) (10.08): I also rise to support the inclusion of the Woden Valley Soccer Club in the National Premier League girls competition and acknowledge the club and the community that are here today. I have spent many years standing on the side of the paddocks at Mawson, being my local playing fields, with three boys that went through playing soccer there.

Woden Valley Soccer Club is one of the great community sporting clubs in my electorate. It has more than 1,600 registered players, as already mentioned, and has a very strong level of girls' participation and junior development. To receive more than 1,000 signatures in such a short period of time is a significant achievement. It shows the strength of feeling in the Woden community, and it shows how many families want to see a clear and fair pathway for girls in football.

Woden Valley has strong junior girls teams, but without access to the National Premier League girls competition, players who want to compete at the highest level are required to leave their local club. That is not good for players, families, volunteers or the local football community. Girls should not have to choose between staying with their community club and pursuing the highest level available to them.

Pathways matter, local clubs matter, and participation by women and girls in sport must be backed by real opportunities. I acknowledge that the decision ultimately sits with Capital Football, but I support the ACT government actively encouraging Capital Football to work constructively with Woden Valley Soccer Club so that girls teams can be included in the NPL girls competition for the 2027 season.

I thank the petitioners, the Woden Valley Soccer Club committee and the many players, families, volunteers and supporters who have put their names to this petition. I also acknowledge my fellow Murrumbidgee members Minister Steel and Minister Paterson for helping bring this important local issue before the Assembly.

Woden is a strong football community, and these girls deserve a pathway that allows them to grow, compete and stay connected to their club—a club developing some of Canberra's best young footballers, who deserve a pathway into the highest competition. Our players deserve the chance to pursue that pathway at home in Woden. I also call on Capital Football to reconsider their decision.

**MS TOUGH** (Brindabella) (10.11): I too am rising to support the Woden Valley Soccer Club. I know I am from Tuggeranong, but credit where credit is due for Woden Valley and south side solidarity! This petition is really important. I have shared it with quite a few constituents—women who play soccer in Tuggeranong and across Canberra—because, as Minister Steel has highlighted, as Minister Paterson has highlighted and as Ms Carrick has highlighted, Woden Valley Soccer Club is a cornerstone of grassroots football in the ACT, and it has the highest level of female participation in the territory.

It is inclusive and community focused, and we should be encouraging that, not standing by while our girls who play incredible junior football are forced to leave their club to keep playing at higher levels. That is bad. It is not just inconvenient to have to leave your club when you reach a certain age and you want to pursue higher levels; it undermines the community. It undermines that continuity.

My brother has been a soccer player since he was five years old, and he still has the same friends that he played with in the under-sixes in kindergarten. A few of them are going to be groomsmen for his wedding next year. This is the kind of thing that community sport fosters, and we need to encourage our community clubs to stick together and foster participation, and the fact that Woden Valley has such great leadership in female participation—we need to encourage that. We need to encourage our girls and our women in sport and keep them in sport and not say, “Hey, you have reached 14 now—are you going to stay with your club, or are you going to go to another club, or are you just going to leave sport altogether because it is just not working out for you?”

I really appreciate Minister Steel bringing this petition. While ultimately the decision is with Capital Football, I think all of us should really get behind the Woden Valley Soccer Club and ensure that Capital Football reconsiders this decision and we create that pathway for our wonderful women playing sport in the territory—and we keep that sense of community together, foster that community and encourage as many girls and kids across Canberra to play sport and stay in sport. I commend the petition 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) (10.13): I want to very briefly speak on this and provide an update to the Assembly. Last week I did meet with Capital Football for a range of other football matters, and I had become aware of this petition, so I took a chance to raise it with Capital Football and bring the petition to their awareness so that they knew that there was a live petition out there for the club.

I did tell them to expect a letter from me that would be asking what the petition requests me to, and whilst at the end of the day, the decision is with Capital Football, I think the many voices in this place, as well as over 1,000 voices in signatures, may perhaps influence Capital Football to change their decision. But I just wanted to provide that quick update today, and I am looking forward to continuing the work in this space.

**Canberra Health Services—staff uniforms—petition 43-26  
Capital Football—Woden Valley Soccer Club—47-26**

**MR PARTON** (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (10.14): I acknowledge the presence in the gallery of quite a number from Woden Valley Soccer Club absolutely in support of what has been put forward here in the chamber today. But I am rising principally to speak to the fun scrubs petition signed by 2,637 Canberrans. Many more healthcare workers, patients and families supported its call. Thanks to my staff and thanks to everyone, including Ms Castley, who joined me out on the road in promoting this one. At its heart, this petition was never really about scrubs; it was about whether the voices of frontline healthcare workers are listened to and respected. It was about

recognising that small decisions made in offices can have real impacts on staff morale, workplace culture and patient experience.

I know that the minister will again stand and claim that the colourful or fun scrubs were never under threat, that the change was not being considered and that these concerns were misplaced. I am not sure that anybody believes her. Certainly, we were contacted by quite a number of staff under the health umbrella who did not just refer to the email but referred to other specific directives that were given to them. And if indeed the minister's assertions were truly correct, more than 2,600 people would not have felt compelled to sign this petition, healthcare workers would not have spoken out, and this issue would never have gained the level of workforce and community support that it did.

The reality is that the tone-deaf approach from management created unnecessary anxiety among staff. Rather than engaging constructively with concerns, healthcare workers were left feeling that a harmless and positive piece of their workplace culture was at risk. I think what this petition demonstrates is that Canberrans value the people who care for them. They absolutely value them. They understand that colourful scrubs help create a welcoming environment for patients, particularly children—they contribute positively to staff wellbeing. I thank every person who signed this petition. Their message is clear: listen to frontline staff, trust their judgment and stop creating problems where none exist. The government should take this message seriously, and I get the impression that they will. So thanks to all and sundry.

**MR COCKS** (Murrumbidgee) (10.16): I would like to speak to both petitions today, because we have two petitions before us that are fundamentally about empowerment. Mr Speaker, we have a petition that is about the empowerment of girls to pursue the sport that they love. The girls of Woden Valley absolutely should have a pathway through to elite. We have a petition that is about empowerment of those who care for us when we most desperately need it—empowerment of our healthcare workers to express themselves in a positive and uplifting way.

I want to dwell on this one for a moment, because just ahead of everything hitting the media and then the launch of this petition, I had reason to be spending a fair bit of time in a hospital with a family member. I spoke with the nurses there about their concerns about fun scrubs, nurses who would come in and brighten our day every day that we were there. They were absolutely of the belief that the management were trying to take away fun scrubs and force them to just wear plain scrubs every day, even though it was the way that they expressed themselves and a positive for every person in those wards. Let me tell you that the attitude of those nurses and the positivity that they brought was absolutely uplifting on those wards. And I wholeheartedly support Mr Parton's sponsorship of this petition.

I want to finish with an extra message for the girls from Woden Valley. One of the things that Minister Paterson said was that you cannot be what you cannot see. I know that is something that gets repeated frequently, but I do not think it is true, because if that were the case, there would never be a first. I would encourage those girls wholeheartedly: pursue the things that you are passionate about, no matter whether you can see it in front of you or not, because if you can dream it, you can be it.

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH** (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (10.19): I also want to welcome the teams, the players, coaches and support people from the Woden Valley Soccer Club to the chamber today. I will also be speaking about fun scrubs. I wish you all the very best in your campaign and wholeheartedly endorse the comments of my colleagues.

In relation to fun scrubs, I must admit it is a truism that the worst day in government is better than the best day in opposition. But having spent many hours recently in a windowless room with my colleagues, putting together the budget, and seeing Mr Parton standing out in the sun talking to healthcare workers, patients and carers about fun scrubs, I did have some moments of jealousy and thought that there were some benefits to being in opposition!

In all seriousness, I do commend Mr Parton for finding an excuse to get out and have conversations with our healthcare workers, patients and carers. It is really important. It is also important to recognise that CHS's uniform policy was developed in consultation with staff.

I want to acknowledge that the original email that kicked off this debate was awkwardly worded, but I should emphasise that the intent of the email was primarily to request that nursing and midwifery staff not wear theatre scrubs outside procedural areas. These scrubs are specifically designed to be worn within the peri-operative area and other procedural areas and not across the general campus. These are infection prevention and control measures to reduce the risk to patients.

This was taken as an opportunity by the heads of our nursing and midwifery areas to remind nursing and midwifery staff of the CHS nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing dress, uniform and personal appearance policy, with additional information around how staff who need to obtain a uniform could do that. This policy has been in place since June 2022 and outlines the organisational expectations of the approved standard of workplace dress for nurses and midwifery staff to maintain a professional image while providing care.

The policy itself was, as I said, developed in consultation with staff and it is consistent with the work that CHS conducted in 2024, as part of its broader branding project, which I know Ms Castley has had a lot to say about in the past. As part of that work, CHS surveyed staff and ran face-to-face focus groups. There were 329 responses to the survey. Seven focus groups were conducted. The content to promote the focus groups and results reached over 4,200 views on the CHS intranet.

Two of the key things from staff at the forums were that CHS staff viewed uniforms that were currently worn across the organisation as inconsistent, unprofessional, mismatched, disorganised and random, and that CHS staff would expect a uniform to foster professionalism and be identifiable and consistent.

CHS has seen the value in nursing and midwifery staff wearing uniforms, including the fact that uniforms support patient, client and employee safety, meaning nurses and midwives are identifiable in a very busy setting, and sometimes in emergency situations, and are not confused with other clinicians, and that they promote

professionalism and credibility. But CHS also recognises that fun scrubs—non-uniform scrub pants and tops—are appropriate in a range of settings, and that is why it enables local areas to set their own arrangements around this.

For example, in paediatrics, it is very common to see nurses wearing fun scrubs and other stuff. That is great; it brightens up the days of families and children, and it makes everyone feel included. In other areas, I have talked to nurses who have a “on Wednesdays we wear pink” policy that is supported by management. This is about horses for courses, in terms of what is appropriate in individual areas. In some areas, a uniform makes a lot more sense. In other areas, fun scrubs will be absolutely appropriate.

I want to finish by saying that the uniform policy is being reviewed this year, and the feedback received as part of this petition will no doubt feed into that review. I can assure Mr Parton that the review will engage staff in the conversation.

**MS VASSAROTTI** (Kurrajong) (10.24): I want to speak to both petitions. I also want to acknowledge the members of the Woden Valley Soccer Club. There are a lot of football families visiting the chamber, and I am the parent of a talented female football player. With respect to Capital Football, and reflecting on this issue, it would be really useful for them to reflect on the history of what has happened, particularly with female football over the last period of time.

My female footballer did not have a pathway when she was a teenager, and she had to leave her club. Capital Football offered the opportunity of the Canberra United Academy at the time as a pathway program. Very unfortunately, in 2023, they disbanded that program. Again, my talented footballer was clubless and not able to have a pathway. She did find another club. Unfortunately, for the first time this year she has decided not to play football, partly because of the turmoil.

We can look as well at what has happened in Gungahlin, with the demise of that club. For all footballers, but particularly for female footballers, what has happened in terms of this local region has been quite disruptive for our young, talented women who want to play football. I would ask Capital Football to think about what that history has been and how we can support our young women to make sure that they continue to play football all through their lives, because it is an incredibly important and protective factor, in terms of navigating this very complex life. I want to acknowledge everything they have been doing in getting this issue on the table and urge Capital Football to think carefully about where to go next.

I would also like to speak quickly in support of the petition about the uniform policy of Canberra Health Services. The Greens believe that this matter speaks to the wellbeing of both our healthcare workers and the patients that they care for. This petition highlights significant community and staff concern about the interpretation of uniform requirements, particularly around the wearing of fun scrubs.

It is not just about clothing; it is about creating a healthcare environment that supports both staff morale and patient experience. We know that vibrant, patterned scrubs are increasingly common across healthcare settings in Australia and internationally. They serve important purposes. They help staff to express individuality, create a more

welcoming environment for patients, especially children and vulnerable people, and improve workplace morale.

Research suggests that wearing colourful, patterned scrubs can boost healthcare workers' confidence, self-esteem and performance. The psychological benefits extend to overall job satisfaction and mental wellbeing. Scrub colour and style also shape patient perception. Colourful, patterned scrubs can have a positive psychological effect on children, as well as being a great conversation starter. Research suggests that there are real, tangible benefits for both patients and healthcare workers.

It is concerning that recent communications with staff have stated that fun scrubs were not part of the CHS uniform, but I do acknowledge the minister stating that the wording was quite awkward. We do know that the messaging, understandably, has caused frustration and uncertainty amongst healthcare workers, at a time when workforce morale is already under considerable pressure.

The Greens support the three clear requests in this petition. Firstly, it calls on the government to amend and clarify the uniform policy to explicitly permit the wearing of appropriate fun scrubs by nursing, midwifery and other clinical staff—subject, obviously, to infection control safety and professional standards. Secondly, any revised policy must provide clear, territory-wide guidance so that staff are not subject to inconsistent interpretation across different hospitals, wards or clinical settings. Thirdly, it urges the government to recognise the positive contribution that fun scrubs make to patient experience, staff wellbeing and workplace culture, and support their continued use.

It is a simple, practical and common-sense issue that can make a real difference to the daily experience of both our healthcare workforce and the people they serve.

**MR WERNER-GIBBINGS** (Brindabella) (10.29): I will speak lengthily on both petitions! On the first one, I checked in with the lucky person I am married to, who works at the Canberra Hospital, about fun scrubs. From what she said, the minister's statement about them being suitable on most occasions, but not all occasions, and that those decisions are made at the discretion of the units, checks out.

Also, I am the father of a daughter who plays for the Tuggeranong United Football Club. We spend a lot of time in the Woden Valley, in Beasley Street in Mawson, watching her beat up on Woden Valley Lorikeets, or Parakeets. The set-up at Woden Valley is brilliant. The junior program for girls is thriving. The fact that there is not a pathway like there is at Tuggeranong for girls to be motivated to chase and play senior football is a surprise to me.

I am a member of the committee that I think this petition will come to. It is difficult for a committee to make a really useful inquiry into what is happening at a non-government organisation, but there are perhaps some questions that we can ask—I am not speaking as the chair, but as a member of that committee—about how Capital Football works with the government, how it is working with its clubs, and where some decisions might be made that could support its work and enable the petitioners to get what they want to achieve, which is an opportunity to compete at levels that they need to make the most of themselves, their teams and their football.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## Deputy Chief Minister

### Motion of censure

**MR PARTON** (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (10.31), by leave: Together with Ms Clay, I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) Notes:

- (a) the release of the independent ACT Public School System Resourcing Review (the Review) which has revealed a series of deep and systemic failures within the ACT education system, including:
  - (i) a system plagued by confusion, inconsistency and poor communication;
  - (ii) a growing administrative burden pulling teachers away from classrooms;
  - (iii) a central office growing faster than schools themselves;
  - (iv) inequality between schools, with some able to offer enrichment programs; while others struggle to maintain basic staffing;
  - (v) rising occupational safety concerns; and
  - (vi) inadequate provision for supports for students with disabilities and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.
- (b) that despite repeated warning from teachers, learning support assistants, principals, students and parents, the Minister for Education repeatedly claimed the system was performing strongly and dismissed calls for reform for years;
- (c) that the Education Directorate's minimal engagement with the substance of AEU enterprise bargaining claims for educators and Learning Support Assistants has driven public school workers to strike for the first time in 14 years;
- (d) the following reports into Housing ACT's programs:
  - (i) the July 2023 and March 2026 Ombudsman reports which found Housing ACT did not properly support vulnerable tenants on their Growing and Renewing Public Housing Program, failed to meet its legal obligations as a landlord and detailed serious safety and maintenance concerns;
  - (ii) the May 2024 and April 2025 Auditor-General reports into the Growing and Renewing Public Housing Program which found that Housing ACT had failed to manage risks to tenant wellbeing and failed to manage probity risks;
  - (iii) the January 2026 Supreme Court finding which found the Commissioner for Social Housing breached tenants' human rights in the Growing and Renewing Public Housing Program; and
  - (iv) evidence presented to the Public Accounts and Administration Committee which showed Housing ACT had not properly

maintained or managed Specialist Disability Accommodation properties.

- (2) Recognises the role that the Assembly plays in holding the Government to account, particularly in the context of the Westminster conventions on ministerial accountability in our system of responsible government; and
- (3) Censures Minister Yvette Berry for the ACT Government's performance in the critical areas of education and housing.

We are elected to this place to represent constituents. That is why we are here. Those who are given the privilege of a ministerial role have the task of running the various directorates, developing and implementing policies that their parties take in the various elections and that have been passed in the Assembly, and getting the job done. It is an extremely important job. If there are ongoing systemic failures in core components of ministerial roles, it is up to this parliament to call it out loudly and put it on the record in the strongest possible way, and that is what we are doing today. Indeed, we could put it on the record in a stronger way, but I will not go there.

Ministers must be responsible for outcomes, be they good or bad and, with so many of the outcomes that have been delivered by this minister, it does not matter which way you spin them, they are monumentally bad. They just are. The Canberra Liberals are not comfortable with simply accepting these diabolical outcomes. We kind of accept mediocrity, but we just cannot accept ongoing disaster.

This motion comes today, coincidentally, on the day that a lot—I do not know how many are out there, but I was out there earlier; hundreds—of the ACT public school community have converged on Civic to protest their frustration with this minister. I cannot believe how the negotiations between government and the AEU have proceeded over the last nine months—or, indeed, have not proceeded.

The Canberra Liberals went to the last election with some policies around the way that our school systems work, and with a particular focus on the existing autonomous schools model which, it was very clear, had some exceptionally bad outcomes. The minister chose to cling steadfastly to the sinking ship of individual school economies. It has led to blowouts left, right and centre. The minister repeatedly insisted that the system was performing strongly, and it was not.

The independent ACT Public School System Resourcing Review has exposed the deep and systemic failures across education. It has led to a massive backflip from this minister. But, from our reading of that situation, it is too late. This territory cannot let this debacle pass without putting a black mark on the report card of the education minister.

Mr Speaker, do not get me started on housing. I was the shadow minister for housing for eight years and I have seen firsthand on, genuinely, hundreds of occasions, Canberrans who have been let down in their homes. As I have stated in this place on a number of occasions, housing is such an important portfolio, because you are dealing with individuals in the place where they wake up, the place where they go to bed and the place where they have birthday parties. This is where they live, and we have let so many of them down over such a long period of time.

The record in housing is damning. We have seen Ombudsman's reports, we have seen Auditor-General investigations, and we have seen a Supreme Court finding that human rights were breached. This minister talks a big talk in the housing space, but she has not been delivering for a long time. It is a big thing to censure a minister in this place. Certainly, in my time here, there has only been one successfully prosecuted.

We believe that it is time to stand up and say that what is going on in these two portfolios is not up to the mark, and I commend the censure motion to the Assembly.

**MS CLAY** (Ginninderra) (10.36): I rise to speak to the motion circulated in my name and Mr Parton's name. The Greens have not come to this point lightly. Schools autonomy is not working. It is breaking our schools and our teachers, and it has let down a generation of our kids. The problems with schools autonomy and the school system are well known. They are known to any parent, any teacher, any learning support assistant and to our community. It should not have needed a review to tell the minister about these problems, and to prompt action.

We are glad the review has been conducted, we are glad it has delivered results, and we are glad the minister has begun to take steps to action it. But the minister has been telling us for decades that the system is performing strongly. She has been denying the problem in the face of evidence for years, and it is not good enough. Our kids have suffered.

The teachers have been trying so hard to bring these problems to the attention of the minister. The Labor government—the party of teachers and nurses—has not listened. They have failed to listen for almost a year, and they have engaged so poorly that today will be the first strike for almost 15 years.

This action is not taken lightly by our teachers. It is an act of desperation to get the minister and the government to listen. I was out there this morning. I was chatting to a teacher who showed me the bruises on her arms and spoke about having to deal with classrooms of 75 children. These people are not taking action lightly; they are desperate to be heard.

The minister needs to be held to account for her lack of action on education.

The minister also needs to be held to account for her lack of action on public housing. We often talk in here about the importance of providing safe, appropriate, affordable public housing which sustains the lives of our tenants—our people—and allows them to be the best people that they can be. Some of the people who live in these properties are our most vulnerable in our community.

The minister for housing often talks about her office being open to help public housing tenants, and I know it is; I have sent many cases to her office. Some of those are resolved, some are not. But the point is that we should not continue to have systemic failures that lead to a need for regular office intervention. The minister should have provided us with a functioning public housing system by now.

The ACT government allocates significant sums of money each year to ensure that the public housing portfolio meets the needs of people living in public housing homes. In

yesterday's budget, we saw \$183 million in additional funding—identified over four years—to strengthen public housing repairs and maintenance. That brought us up to a total of \$400 million. That is great, but it is not working.

In 2024-25, \$36.6 million was spent on homelessness services and \$140 million committed over four years. At 30 June 2025, according to the CSD report, there were 11,873 public housing properties providing homes for over 20,000 people. Of those households, 52 per cent included someone with a disability and 91 per cent of tenancies were in receipt of a rental rebate.

So why is it, when I look at the latest report on government services, that I see that the proportion of public housing homes in the ACT where the condition is of an acceptable standard is 71 per cent?

Only seven in 10 homes are of an acceptable standard, and that has dropped since 2023. The standard of maintenance has dropped since that first ombudsman report in 2023. The standard of maintenance is even worse for tenants with a disability; only 65 per cent of their homes are of an acceptable standard.

Let us talk about what that means: to be of an acceptable standard. It is not a high benchmark. The condition of a dwelling is measured as a household with at least four working facilities and not more than two major structural problems. That should not be a high benchmark to achieve. Only two structural problems and you will pass. Almost one third of our public homes are not passing that test. Even more are failing in regard to households where someone has a disability.

It is not only the Productivity Commissioner who is shining a light on this; the Auditor-General has undertaken two inquiries on the Growing and Renewing Public Housing Program, reporting in 2024 and 2025. In the later report, he concluded that the procurement of construction services was effective but that selling and purchasing houses was not, and he noted serious probity risks. We are talking about almost \$1 billion of capital investment in an area that is in desperate need of capital, and where the Auditor-General is noting serious probity and governance and management concerns.

The 2024 audit found that Housing ACT had failed to effectively manage risks to tenant wellbeing, and program delivery associated with the required relocation of public housing tenants from those homes selected for sale or demolition.

Look, I think a lot of us had interactions with the people who are on that list. It was devastating. That program was not delivered well.

The concerns about the treatment of tenants when being relocated from the homes were again highlighted in the 2023 report by the ombudsman titled, *How do you tell someone they have to move?*

Housing ACT did not do a good job of telling someone they had to move. Their implementation of mandatory relocation found that, amongst other things, Housing ACT had underestimated the impact on tenants, and their communication with tenants was impersonal and caused significant stress. This then ended up in the Supreme Court

and the court found that it was a breach of human rights. The administrative decision making there was done so poorly it actually breached people's human rights.

The ombudsman released a further report earlier this year titled, *Falling through the gaps. How Housing ACT manages tenant requests for repairs to their homes*. It was damning. The ombudsman found that requests were taking too long to complete, and that this was leaving some tenants in hazardous situations with mould or leaking roofs in their homes. The accounts from individual tenants experiencing this were shocking.

These are serious findings. And they are not one set of serious findings; they are five sets: two from the ombudsman, two from the Auditor General, one from the Supreme Court. These regulators have told the minister repeatedly over the last three years that the program she is running, and administration of public housing is failing.

There is another inquiry under way, and we do not know what that inquiry will find because it is still on foot. But just over a month ago the Standing Committee on Public Accounts and Administration heard all the same evidence of neglect in the maintenance of dwellings occupied by people with a disability living in Housing ACT properties. We hear all the same evidence that those homes were below acceptable standards of safety. That evidence is on the register; it is in submissions. The same problems—electrical faults, structural issues, black mould, major safety concerns—were reported to our committee this year; three years after the first ombudsman report. The minister has had three years to make improvements, and our people are still suffering.

The committee also heard that in 2017 Housing ACT had registered as a Specialist Disability Accommodation provider with the National Disability Insurance Agency. It enrolled 112 dwellings in 2020, and explored how the SDA provider function could be used so that people who received SDA funding could access that funding to make necessary works to upgrade accessibility and to improve liveability.

Housing ACT highlighted some concerns with SDA arrangements, and in 2025 Housing ACT deregistered. At the hearing, I asked a lot of questions about that decision and so did others. Neither Housing ACT nor the minister were able to provide advice on the future of Housing ACT as an SDA provider. The minister could not answer my questions. The minister said I was looking for a “gotcha”.

I am not looking for a “gotcha”. I am looking for basic living standards and respect for the human rights of our people. I am asking the government to be a responsible landlord. The minister has been told this very clearly now—in two ombudsman reports, two Auditor-General reports and by the Supreme Court, and we have another inquiry underway—and things do not seem to have improved.

I have struggled to reconcile our treatment of some of our most vulnerable people in our community with the often-repeated claim that the ACT is an inclusive and just community. Why, despite that we are well-intentioned and we have good policy goals, are we failing to plan adequately to run our programs? Why do we wonder why people do not trust what the government says, and find it confusing and stressful? Why is the government not clearly explaining their processes, people's rights and their options?

Why is the government not working this out from the outset; deciding what people need,

understanding that people will need rights to review, and that they will need their rights clearly explained and they will need clear communication?

Why is the government not making tenants feel heard? Why are tenants feeling like decisions are predetermined, not negotiated? Why is the government not allowing tenants to participate in decision making on matters that affect them?

Why is the government not providing the basic maintenance on public homes which other landlords would be required to do?

The government does not even have a plan to build enough public and community homes to meet our needs. They are not meeting their targets, and the targets they are setting do not even meet our population growth. This is a plan to fail.

In this term alone, the public housing waitlist has grown to over 3,500. We have more than 500 new households on that waitlist than there were at the start of this term. This shows that the problem is getting worse. What the government is doing is not making things better.

When I ask these questions in the chamber and in committee, I do not get the answers. I am told to send individual cases to the minister, which I do. But what about the systemic problems that are causing those individual issues? What about the hundreds of people who do not manage to find a politician to complain to, individually? That is not what it should take to have your basic rights heard and to have your basic needs met.

I am told some policy is incoming or is underway, like insourcing. Insourcing is great; the Greens love insourcing. Every time we ask how insourcing will lead to better public home maintenance, we are not given the answers.

How many years do our tenants have to wait in substandard living conditions before their basic rights and needs are met? Will it be in another three years or another six years or another nine years? How many reports does it need before the minister will take action?

Mr Speaker, I want to be clear: this is not a “gotcha” moment. The ACT Greens are not interested in “gotchas”. We have not come to this decision lightly. We are interested in ministerial accountability. Accountability means accepting the problem and understanding your role in the problem, and your responsibility for it. As a minister, you are responsible for your portfolio and for the delivery of your programs; taking action to make sure that you are improving it, and it does not happen again; and telling everybody really clearly what that pathway is to get to a better place.

This is an explanation that our schools deserve, our children and teachers deserve, and people living in our public housing deserve. It is an explanation that our whole community deserves.

**MS CARRICK** (Murrumbidgee) (10.47): Managing portfolios is a whole-of-government issue. Minister Berry could have asked for measures in cabinet in the past, and perhaps they were denied. But ministers need ambition for their portfolio areas.

They need to listen to what people are saying about the problems, and they need to be persistent in taking action to resolve them, and this is ultimately why I am supporting this motion. Because what we are seeing in the education portfolio is not just a question of resourcing, although that matters. It is a question of leadership. It is whether the minister has shown the urgency, the curiosity and the determination needed to respond to the issues being raised by the community.

From a teachers' and parents' perspective, those issues are real and immediate. They want to be heard. Parents are telling us their children are not getting the support they need in classrooms. Teachers are stretched. Behavioural challenges are increasing. Learning gaps are not being addressed early enough. Too often, families are left carrying the load, advocating, organising support and trying to make the system work for their children. They are not asking for perfection. They are asking for a system that works, for their children to feel safe, supported and able to learn.

At the same time, we see similar pressures in housing. Tenants are raising concerns about maintenance delays, about the condition of their homes and about responses that take too long or fall short. These are not minor issues; they go to health, safety and dignity. Again, the experience is consistent: people raise concerns, they follow up and they wait. They want to be heard.

Then there is community infrastructure, particularly sporting facilities, where the consequences of inaction are just as visible. We do not have enough sporting facilities in our community. That is the reality. Molonglo needs a recreation precinct with tennis courts and a skate park. When the Woden recreation precinct was demolished and replaced with residential towers, vital community assets disappeared and the precinct was not replaced.

We were told schools could fill the gap, but they cannot. We do not have strong embedded sporting pathways through schools to absorb that demand. Instead, we have clubs scattered across multiple sites, six school halls and a church hall; fragmented, disconnected and constantly competing for space. It matters because sport is not just about activity, it is about community health. It is where young people find connections, structure and belonging. Without central, local hubs, those connections weaken. Particularly as young people leave school, many simply stop participating. They drift away from those positive environments. Then we see the consequences: greater disconnection, fewer structured supports and fewer opportunities for communities to mentor young people locally.

Across schools, across housing, across sporting and community infrastructure, we are hearing the same concerns repeated. People are stretched, the system is under pressure, and the response is not keeping pace.

No one is suggesting these challenges are easy. They are complex. But people are speaking clearly, and they want to be heard. Parents, tenants, teachers and community groups are identifying the problems. They are pointing to what is not working and they are looking to the minister for action.

Leadership requires more than acknowledging issues. It requires driving solutions, advocating strongly, and responding with urgency when patterns become clear. We see

a pattern of delays, a pattern of missed opportunities, a pattern where concerns are recognised but not resolved in a way that restores confidence. The government says it is progressive, but it is not clear to me that this is the case.

This motion is not about personal criticism; it is about accountability. Because when the same issues are raised again and again, responsibility sits with the minister. It is the minister's job to address the issues being raised, and when that is not happening, this Assembly has the responsibility to say so. That is why I support this motion.

**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) (10.52): Thank you for the chance to respond to this motion today. In the 10 years that I have been minister for education and minister for housing, I have never shied away from reform. In those 10 years, we have achieved some big things. We have rolled out three-year-old preschools to all ACT families. We have built more public and affordable housing than ever before, and in this budget, we have just launched the biggest reform for public education in a generation. In those 10 years, I have also overseen many bargaining rounds, seeing ACT public school teachers being the highest and best paid in the country.

I have never shied away from reform and I am not shying away now. Yes, I have a history of defending public education and public housing. I always have and I always will. Canberra has a very good public education system. The chair of the expert panel has said that. Our results show that. But you are not a real advocate for public education if you do not want more. Of course, I want more. I want a stronger, fairer public education system for Canberra. And I want more, better public housing for everyone who needs it. When the government has received feedback from the independents and external bodies, we have responded.

In housing, we have accepted the recommendations of the ombudsman and the Auditor-General. When issues were raised about relocating tenants, I apologised and I stopped the relocation program. I personally referred the specialist disability accommodation matter to the Auditor-General because I was concerned. When I need advice external experts, I seek it out.

In education, I commissioned the public school resourcing review based on the feedback from public education stakeholders. The government needed independent advice from external experts, to be able to make this generational reform. They have delivered that advice and now I am acting on it.

I always own it when it goes wrong. I am not perfect by any means, but I turn up and I accept responsibility when I have got it wrong. I take on the criticism and recommendations, and I make change where it is right.

Every week of the year I meet with stakeholders to hear directly about what the government is doing and what we have got wrong. I speak with tenants, teachers, students and the community sector, and their voices inform every decision I make as minister. These conversations are not always easy—and I do not want them to be—but they are always respectful because, at the end of the day, we are all working our guts out for a fairer Canberra. Canberrans should expect politicians to adapt, change and

reform. Public education does not stand still; public housing does not stand still; and neither do I.

I will never be a politician who is afraid to face hard truths, offer genuine solutions and adapt when things change. That is what Canberrans expect and that is what they deserve. I know the power of public education and public housing. I was a public-school kid. My children went to public schools. I grew up in public housing. Public education and public housing have the power to change lives for the better. I know that because I have lived it. For as long as I am in this place, I will be a defender of public education and public housing.

I will strive for a stronger, fairer public education system. I will always fight for more public housing for those who need it. That is what these reforms are all about. I will keep working, as I always have, for a fairer Canberra. Even after today, Mr Speaker, my door will still be open. I will keep turning up, putting in the work and keep having the difficult conversations that are needed.

**MR EMERSON**(Kurrajong) (10.56): I will be supporting the censure motion today. Unlike others, I would like to take some time to explain why. While I can see why the Public School System Resourcing Review has been used in part to trigger this motion, for me it is not the sticking point and not the primary reason I am supporting a censure of Minister Berry for the ACT government's performance in the critical areas of education and housing. I have been raising issues, asking questions and pointing to concerning trends in several of Minister Berry's portfolio areas over the last two years, including education, housing and, as Ms Carrick touched on, sport and recreation.

First, I would like to speak to community sport. Every member in this place has heard from organisations and individuals about their frustrations with the inadequacy of sporting facilities across the ACT. This is unsurprising given the ACT government lacks a clear long-term plan for community sporting infrastructure. I also understand that every non-government member in this place supports a 10-year community sport infrastructure plan. The reason is obvious. How can we possibly meet our community's needs without a plan for doing so? We know the growth potential of many sports in the ACT is shackled due to a lack of facilities, which in turn makes forward planning nearly impossible. Expecting organisations to put in the same frivolous funding applications for infrastructure projects year on year is a ridiculous waste of time, especially for the smaller grassroots clubs that often have the greatest need, not to mention for the government.

A 10-year community sport infrastructure plan would allow sporting organisations to align their ambitions to agreed government investment priorities rather than be kept forever in the dark. These views were reflected in evidence provided to the Standing Committee on Economics, Industry and Recreation's inquiry into community sport in the ACT last year. When I put those views to the government during the hearings, asking whether a 10-year infrastructure plan was in the pipeline, an official stated, "We would certainly like that to be the outcome." Then Minister Berry warned:

The absolute challenge with a longer term plan like that, even though it would be nice to have something like that, is decisions of future governments to funding and managing the expectations of the community.

Of course, the solution to this problem is not to avoid setting community expectations—that being the implication of Minister Berry’s remarks, as I understood them—but actually meeting those expectations. A government that has been in power for a quarter of a century should be able to deliver on its own plans. Much of this debate is not about doing new things and not about doing different things; it is about doing things that the government has said it would do and has failed to do. I can also understand Minister Berry’s hesitation during that exchange, given the plans in her portfolio areas that have been announced, prepared and published but not implemented.

Yesterday’s budget contained \$750,000 for a new aquatic strategy, which is very welcome, but it is worth pointing out that the existing aquatic facilities planning framework that that aquatic strategy is replacing was not implemented and was supposed to run until 2033. That framework, published in 2013, identified a new city aquatic facility with diving facilities as a high priority—the headline project listed in the framework—yet no such facility has been delivered during the time of that framework, although one is now being planned for Commonwealth Park. Despite the 2013 framework explicitly calling out the need for diving facilities, the minister is responsible for delivering on that framework originally ruled out a dive pool for the new city aquatic facility. That has now finally being planned, 13 years after the government’s planning framework identified it as a top priority.

In education, the ACT government’s Language Education Action Plan was published in April 2024, yet two years later, in a recent public hearing, the minister described language education as “not a priority right now”. The fourth action in this plan was to “explore options for alternative delivery models for public school language education programs which will provide flexible and innovative solutions for students wishing to undertake a pathway for proficiency”, and to do so by the end of 2025. But, due to the closure of CIT’s Centre for Modern Languages and the ACT government’s decision not to follow other jurisdictions in taking over the delivery of a centralised language offering for years 11 and 12 students in the ACT, we now have fewer delivery models for public school language education programs than when the Language Education Action Plan was released two years ago.

On housing, the ACT government launched a 10-year Housing Strategy in 2018. Objective 4E of this strategy was to “target programs to increase supply of affordable housing for vulnerable and disadvantaged households”. One of four actions under that objective was to “work with the National Disability Insurance Agency, the development sector and people with disabilities and their families and carers to identify potential opportunities to facilitate the development of specialist disability accommodation under the National Disability Insurance Scheme”, the NDIS.

As Ms Clay pointed out, Housing ACT was registered to deliver specialist disability accommodation, or SDA, in 2017—unbeknownst to the minister, as we have since learned, which is concerning in and of itself. Two years ago, after a number of disability service providers noticed that none of the significant sums of federal funding sitting in the packages of their SDA-eligible clients who lived in public housing was being accessed by Housing ACT, Senate estimates questioning from Senator Pocock revealed that neither the ACT government nor the federal government knew how many people were actually eligible for this funding and were living in public housing or how much

money was being missed out on as a consequence. This prompted the ACT government to announce a four-month consultation process to investigate SDA access in public housing. But, in November 2025, we found out that the promised consultation process announced 18 months prior ever happened. Minister Berry said she did not know why and, in a remarkable move, referred a government agency for which she holds ministerial responsibility to the Auditor-General for investigation.

Housing ACT still has no idea how much funding it has missed out on for public housing tenants with disabilities in any of the eight years since the government registered for this program. Importantly, it is funding that those people cannot access directly. Only their housing provider can access it on their behalf. Because the government does not know, as Ms Clay pointed out, an Assembly committee is trying to figure out just how much funding people with disability have missed out on because of this. The best estimates are that it could be anywhere from \$10 million to \$30 million—millions of dollars in federal funding that could have realised objective 4E in the government’s own Housing Strategy.

In March this year, as has been remarked, the ACT Ombudsman released a report finding that Housing ACT had failed to meet its legal obligations to public housing tenants in our community with respect to repairs and maintenance. A key recommendation from the report was for Housing ACT to ensure it completed non-urgent requests for repairs and maintenance within four weeks. That recommendation was accepted by the government, but, three months later, I learned that at least one of the tenants whose experiences were included in the Ombudsman’s report still had not had their issues resolved. Twelve weeks after the government accepted a recommendation that issues like theirs should be resolved within four weeks, that tenant came to me. I asked about this in question time, and we learned that the minister had not contacted the Ombudsman’s office to get the details of the Canberrans featured in the report so that their issues could be actioned.

My point in presenting these examples is that we have seen significant failures in multiple portfolios of Minister Berry, even under the government’s own plans, strategies and agreed recommendations. Of course, the Ombudsman’s report was no surprise to any of us, and no surprise to anyone who lives in public housing in the ACT. As Ms Clay pointed out, the Productivity Commission’s latest Report on Government Services, released earlier this year, shows that the proportion of public housing in the ACT whose condition is of an acceptable standard has decreased from 76 per cent in 2023 to 71 per cent in 2025. “Acceptable standard” means having at least four working facilities—things like a shower and a stove—and no more than two major structural defects. Two major structural defects are okay, though, as long as there are no more than two! Almost a third of our public housing dwellings do not meet that very low standard. This is the second-lowest rate in the country, and it is worsening every time this data is released.

I go back to education. Schools are closed and teachers are striking outside the Assembly as we speak because they have had enough. Families across the ACT are backing them, and for good reason. We have already heard in other members’ remarks about the issues and massive inefficiencies that have plagued our public education system, as laid bare by the recent Public School System Resourcing Review. The fact is—and I think Ms Carrick spoke to this well—the minister holds ultimate

responsibility for the success or failure of the ACT public education system. The tragic truth right now is that many parents who strongly support public education are losing faith in the system. I know that because they tell me, and I know they tell other members as well. They are distraught and feeling pushed to take their kids out of their local public school, despite being firm believers in the value of public education.

This shows up in the numbers. Enrolments in our public schools are dropping in gross terms, not just as a proportion of total enrolments. Public school enrolments decreased year on year from 2021 to 2025 by 0.1 per cent, one per cent, 0.6 per cent and 0.2 per cent respectively. This compares to a consistent and significant growth in independent school enrolments over the same period: 1.6 per cent, 3.7 per cent, 3.4 per cent and 1.5 per cent. Catholic schools have also seen notable increases during that time. Yet, when I moved an amendment calling on the government to invest sufficiently in the ACT public education system to arrest declining public school enrolments, the minister responsible for that system voted against it.

We have seen declining enrolments used to justify de-scoping of school infrastructure projects. Majura Primary will no longer be expanded, despite earlier promises and obvious need. It turns out that, when a school is packed to the rafters and that is impacting staff and students, and families have other options, parents will take their children out of that school, which of course means reduced growth in enrolments—which in this case has then been used as grounds not to expand a school that is full. This is completely circular thinking, and public school students, teachers and their families are paying the price for it.

The same story is playing out at Lyneham High, where adjusted enrolment projections have been used to defend a decision to refurbish their gymnasium rather than build a new one. That is despite evidence in recent committee hearings from members of the school community that refurbishing the current gym would be a waste of money, because the main problem is not that it is old but that it is too small. The committee has made a recommendation that this decision be revisited, but the government's response tabled yesterday shows they are holding the line and will pour \$5.7 million into nonsensical upgrades that the school community itself, or at least parts of it, appear to oppose.

I have been here for only 20 months. These are some of the deeply concerning issues impacting many members of our community that have arisen in Minister Berry's portfolios during my time here. This Assembly plays a vital role in holding the executive to account. The Labor Party governs our territory with the support of this Assembly. Members of the Assembly have a responsibility to make clear that failings of this nature and scope are seriously concerning to the people we represent, and therefore seriously concerning to us. Given Ms Berry's clear responsibility for these issues as the relevant minister, I see no other option but to support this censure motion this morning.

**MR BARR** (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism and Trade) (11.08): I rise to respond to the motion before the Assembly and to address directly the matters that have been raised. At the outset, I acknowledge that the issues canvassed in the motion, both in education and in public housing, are serious and they go to the core of the public services that the people of

Canberra rely on every day. It is, of course, appropriate that these services are scrutinised in this place and it is appropriate that ministers are held to account. The government does not shy away from that scrutiny, and Minister Berry certainly does not shy away from that scrutiny. However, while the motion raises legitimate issues, it draws a conclusion that does not fairly reflect either the complexity of the challenges or the way the minister has responded to them. For that reason, the government does not support the censure proposed.

Before turning to the detail of the motion, it is useful to reflect on the principle of ministerial responsibility in the Westminster system, because that is, of course, central to the motion before the Assembly today. Ministerial responsibility is a functional and constitutional principle that operates in a modern system of government, and there are two key elements. The first is that ministers are accountable to the Assembly. They must answer questions, explain decisions, be transparent about shortcomings, and accept scrutiny. Those are fundamental principles that Minister Berry has consistently observed. The second is that ministers are responsible for setting direction and ensuring that problems are addressed. When issues arise, ministers are expected to take ownership in a political sense and lead the process of reform.

But it is equally important to be clear about what ministerial responsibility does not extend to. Ministers do not personally administer large and complex directorates. They do not make every operational decision, manage every case or oversee every transaction personally. This is not how modern public administration operates. Directorates and agencies are led by officials with delegated authority and professional responsibility for operational matters. The reality, which is well understood in Westminster systems, is that ministers are responsible for oversight, policy direction and response, not the day-to-day execution of every function within their portfolios. If the Assembly applied a standard that treats ministers as personally responsible for every operational issue in their agencies, no minister in any jurisdiction ever in the history of the world could ever satisfy that test. The proper question is whether the minister has acknowledged issues, engaged with scrutiny and taken actions to address them. On that measure, Minister Berry is discharging her responsibilities.

Turning first to education, the review cited in this motion has identified areas requiring improvement. Minister Berry acknowledged that and, importantly, it was Minister Berry who commissioned the independent review and ensured that it was released publicly. That surely demonstrates to everyone a willingness to confront issues, not avoid them. Minister Berry has accepted the findings and is now leading the work to address them. That includes reducing administrative burden on teachers, strengthening coordination across the system and continuing investment in equity and inclusion, particularly for students with disability and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

The motion speaks to inconsistency across the school system. In touching on that point, I think it is important to recognise the policy framework that has existed in the ACT, even pre-dating self-government. The ACT has long operated under a model of school based decision-making, where principals and local communities have had a high degree of autonomy—although not a high enough degree of autonomy, apparently, if you look back over the history of debates in this place and the position that was taken a decade ago in a similar debate, where the question of how best to manage the school system

was debated following the 2017-18 budget. Interestingly, at the time, the calls from the opposition were for even greater school autonomy, not a more centralised system.

One of the benefits, if you like, of having been here a long time is that I have a long memory and I remember those debates. I remember contributing to them. So, if there is a narrative building that the issue of centralisation versus autonomy has been a conclusive view of this parliament for decades, that is utter rubbish. There has been a contested piece of policy as recently as this decade and certainly within the last decade about, in fact, going the other way and having even more autonomy. I know not everyone was here then and not everyone will search the *Hansard*, but I lived through those debates, so I reject outright any assertion that this question has been universally agreed and Minister Berry has been the sole force pushing against it. In fact, Minister Berry has been on the side of greater centralisation consistently throughout her time as minister for education—often fiercely opposed, sometimes by some members who are sitting here right now arguing a different position. That is reasonably extraordinary, but not entirely out of character for this place. The policy direction that the minister is pursuing reflects a consistent position she has held but is now, of course, based on further information and further work.

The approach of school based autonomy has inevitably brought some variations between schools. It was not so much a design flaw but a consequence of decentralisation. The task for any education minister in any education system is to balance the appropriate level of autonomy within the system with fairness and consistency, and Minister Berry is doing exactly that. The minister is not seeking to abandon school autonomy, but she is not ignoring the challenges that are before her. She is working to improve the way the system supports schools to provide greater clarity and to ensure more consistent outcomes. That is careful and responsible reform. Change is difficult. Anyone who has spent any time in this place would surely recognise that.

In relation to industrial matters, there is no denying that this is a challenging period in industrial relations around our nation. It is the case in education systems nationally. It is not like the ACT is the only education system experiencing some challenges at the moment in relation to enterprise bargaining outcomes. There are workforce pressures and they are acknowledged. Industrial action is always regrettable, but it does not indicate lack of engagement. The minister has been actively involved in negotiations and remains focused on achieving outcomes that support both staff and students.

Turning to housing, the report's reference in the motion raised serious issues. Minister Berry has acknowledged that. The question again is how the minister has responded. She has accepted the findings of the Ombudsman, the Auditor-General and the courts, and she has overseen work to improve maintenance to strengthen tenant support and ensure better management of risk and safety. There is a clear focus on improving outcomes for vulnerable tenants, ensuring that legal and human rights obligations are consistently met and that the issues identified are being addressed. So, across both portfolios referenced in this motion where issues have been identified, they have been acknowledged and action is underway, and that is what ministerial responsibility looks like in practice. It is about confronting problems and addressing them, not pretending they do not exist.

This brings the Assembly to the central question: whether a censure is warranted. It is a serious step. It should be reserved for circumstances where a minister has failed to act, refused to accept responsibility or ignored evidence. That is not what is occurring here. The government acknowledges the matters raised in this motion. The government accepts that improvement is required. Minister Berry is leading that work, consistent with both the expectations and the realities of ministerial responsibility in a modern Westminster system. For these reasons, the government is opposing the censure.

**MS LEE**(Kurrajong) (11.17): Canberra should have the best education system in the nation. We are the nation's capital. We are the most highly educated jurisdiction in the country. Our students should be leading the country. But the reality, after a decade under this minister, is very different. Successive NAPLAN results tell a deeply concerning story. One in three ACT students are below expected standards in reading and numeracy. Literacy outcomes have declined over two decades, and disadvantaged students are falling further and further behind. We now have students in year 9 reading at year 6 level or below. We have a gap between advantaged and disadvantaged students stretching to four years by year 9. This is a system that is failing the very students that it is supposed to lift up.

Let us be very clear about accountability. This minister has been in charge for a decade. For 10 years, she has presided over falling literacy rates, widening inequality, growing pressure on teachers and declining confidence from families. She cannot blame anybody else and she cannot say that she did not know, because she was told. For years, the warning signs have been there. For years, the experts have been telling her about the failings in the system. Teachers told her that workloads were unsustainable. Principals told her that the system was under strain. Parents told her that their children were not getting the support that they needed, and experts told her outcomes were not what children deserved.

What did this minister do? She dismissed their concerns and accused us of talking down our schools. She stood in this chamber time and time again, stood in front of the media time and time again, stood in front of stakeholders, stood in front of the Canberra community, stood in front of the students, stood in front of Canberra families, and said that she was on the right track—adamant that she was on the right track. Today, once again, we see a complete denial, despite the evidence, and it just goes to show that she still does not get it.

Mr Speaker, as shadow minister for education, you released the Canberra Liberals education strategy, “Bringing out the best in every child”, in June 2021, which raised alarm about declining literacy and numeracy rates, overcrowded and outdated infrastructure, bullying, and teacher and student wellbeing. It called for reform and it called for an independent review. What was the minister's response? She rejected it. She dismissed it. She accused the opposition of making up problems, of talking down our schools.

Mr Speaker, imagine if she had listened then. Imagine if she had acted then. How many students would not have fallen behind? How many teachers would not have been pushed to breaking point? How many years would we not have wasted? The tragedy here is not just that things have declined; it is that we have known what works. There is overwhelming evidence, nationally and internationally, that explicit instruction and

phonics-based literacy teaching deliver results.

Other jurisdictions heeded the call and took action. But we do not even have to go beyond our borders. The Catholic system here in the ACT heeded the call and took action, and saw dramatic results, from 42 per cent of schools underperforming in reading to four per cent—from 42 per cent to four per cent in just three years. The evidence was there and the opportunity was lost because, time and time again, year after year, this minister refused to act.

Back in 2019, when I asked about whether the minister would introduce phonics testing following more advice from experts and the federal government, the minister's answer was a simple "no". That one word sums up a decade of this minister's approach: "no" to listening, "no" to evidence and "no" to reform. It was only after sustained pressure from the Canberra Liberals that this minister relented and commissioned an independent review into ACT literacy and numeracy. That expert panel found:

There is an overwhelming body of research demonstrating the positive impact of explicit teaching on student learning outcomes. This has been demonstrated in primary, high school and college settings, across different subject areas and in both Australian and international contexts.

The minister could no longer ignore the evidence. Now we have the ACT Public School System Resourcing Review—another review that this minister was forced to commission following the blowout in ACT school budgets, a teaching workforce on the brink and declining economic results. Yet, when the minister stood in this place last week and again today, she presented this damning review as a generational reform agenda.

Actually, the review is a verdict—a verdict on her management and oversight of the education system over the past decades, and the findings are scathing. A system plagued by confusion, inconsistency and poor communication. A growing administrative burden pulling teachers away from classrooms. Inequality between schools, workforce under pressure and rising occupational safety concerns.

The most damning thing about this is that none of it is new. These issues have been raised directly with the minister for years. The only difference now is that the minister can no longer deny it. In her own words, she now admits, "Our student outcomes are not as strong as we would like or that students deserve." This is an admission of failure. Now, after years of denial, this minister wants to take credit for fixing a problem that she even refused to acknowledge existed in the first place.

ACT Parents said it plainly when the review was released. They said, "The system is not resourced to deliver the equitable education our community expects." They went on to say, "These are problems families have been raising for years." And they are right.

Mr Speaker, as I have said previously in this place, you cannot separate teacher wellbeing from student outcomes. When teachers are exhausted, student learning inevitably suffers. When schools are unable to fill critical roles, disruption becomes the norm rather than the exception. And when support staff are stretched too thin, it is students, particularly those who need the most support, that ultimately miss out. Yet,

after more than 10 months of negotiations, this minister has failed to present a credible and genuine offer to our educators.

Today, we have schools closed across the ACT as a result of the full-day strike action—action that was not taken lightly, but it became necessary because once again the minister has refused to listen and refused to come to the table with a meaningful proposal. We have thousands of teachers, school staff, students and families gathered just outside the Assembly, frustrated, disappointed and driven to protest after months of stalled negotiations. These are the people that are on the front line every single day—educators who carry the real weight of this system. Despite that, they are fighting just to be heard.

The minister has overseen years of underinvestment in and poor planning of school infrastructure. Successive inquiries have repeatedly highlighted overcrowded classrooms, ageing buildings and maintenance backlogs that continue to grow, and the ACT Auditor-General has reinforced those concerns. As a result of this neglect and mismanagement, we have some schools still lacking basic amenities, like adequate heating and cooling, and toilet facilities. This minister talks about a generational shift, but what we are talking about here is a generational failure of leadership, because this did not happen overnight. This is the result of 10 years of ignoring the evidence, dismissing the concerns and refusing to act until the system reached breaking point.

This motion is about accountability. This motion is about sending a signal to our community that there are members in this Assembly that will stand up for the Canberra community, our students, our teachers, school assistants and families. This motion sends a signal to our community that if this minister does not take responsibility, if the Chief Minister will not tell her that she is not up to scratch, then we will. After 10 years, it is clear that the minister has failed in her duty as a minister.

To borrow the Chief Minister's words, "it's extraordinary, but not out of character" to have the Chief Minister come in here and mischaracterise and conflate issues that each of us brings into this place about individual concerns in schools, whether it be a cut to a language system or a broken promise in relation to school infrastructure, and conflate that into a discussion about a systemic failure under his government—whether it goes to school autonomy or a system-wide review. The fact is that this is a government that are deflecting, once again, their own failures, and this Assembly will not accept it.

**MISS NUTTALL**(Brindabella) (11.27): I rise to speak to this censure motion as the ACT Greens spokesperson for education. I note that many points have already been aired. The Greens have harboured significant concerns about the state of the education system, and we have consistently expressed them in this chamber. What has been more challenging has been pointing to specific problems in the system without being met with insistence that they are getting to it, but not actually to a satisfactory answer.

We have been promised a comprehensive school infrastructure audit, because government recognised that our old schools were in such a sorry state that kids could not learn and teachers could not teach. We have not seen the property quality standards—we would love to see them—and we have not seen the resulting audits. We were told in questions on notice to "see above" on those standards, and the trail then went cold, because those questions referred to the government response to the inquiry

into the future of school infrastructure, which simply said:

Work is underway to finalise the development of Property Quality Standards (PQS). Once a set of PQS have been endorsed, the Education Directorate will seek to review ACT public school assets against the PQS and schedule opportunities to carry out infrastructure works as practicable.

We do not have the public evidence to tell us which schools need infrastructure upgrades most urgently, so I have had to rely on ACT Labor election commitments to augur our way to the right information, with middling success. It turns out, as it did in the case of the Lyneham High School gymnasium, where the only plan aired publicly was that of a competition-standard double gymnasium, that the ACT Labor government does not always back ACT Labor's election commitments in their original form.

The ACT Audit Office report on students with a disability in ACT public schools, back in 2023, raised a lot of concerns. One was that, at the time, the Education Directorate could not report the exact number of learning support assistants who were supporting students with a disability in ACT public schools because of limitations in the directorate's human resources information management system. How on earth did we end up with a system where, in the year of our Lord 2022, the Education Directorate's workforce planning could not tell them how many LSAs they were employing across the system?

Another issue was that the Student Centred Assessment of Need—SCAN, as it is more commonly known—model was deficit-oriented and often distressing for families. Students, families and the educators supporting them have been saying this for ages to all of us, but it did not seem to be until the audit was completed and public pressure was levelled at the government that they moved to change it.

On students with a disability, the school resourcing review's final report rehashed a lot of those concerns. Where the 2023 audit found that the SCAN model did not align well with the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability—the NCCD—the school resourcing review further found that, with three or four of the NCCD categories attracting school resource standard loading amounts, of which the Australian government is responsible for at least 20 per cent, it is likely that the public system in the ACT, and potentially other jurisdictions, is under-accessing federal funding for students with a disability and under-allocating the ACT's contribution accordingly, due to inadequate data collection. They found this was likely to be the case because the Education Directorate was not supporting school-based staff with the training, materials and support to assess students' needs under the NCCD.

The school resourcing report overall vindicates what everyone in the system has been saying—students, parents and teachers alike. Today, that same public school system sees every public school in the ACT close for a full day and every public school worker walk off the job, and most of them ended up outside, in Civic Square. They do not do so lightly. They are at their wits' end because no-one in the ACT government has yet substantively engaged with their list of enterprise bargaining claims, 11 months later. This has not been the case in previous rounds, so what has happened?

This year the AEU has had to strike for the first time in 14 years. They have had to do

so twice. LSAs have had to strike for the first time ever. Educators—whether they are teachers, LSAs, principals, career practitioners, school psychologists, teacher librarians, or any one of the many more brilliant public school workers and educators—do not strike lightly. They know, far better than anyone, the impact on young people’s education, but their hand has been forced because the current minister for education has not been able to galvanise her directorate to give a proper answer to reasonable claims.

Yesterday, I spoke about the minister’s failure to progress work on the review of the school assistant classifications framework, and I acknowledge her apology for the failure. But it is hard to rationalise the fact that, during this period of work not being done—work that forms the basis of one of the AEU’s key claims, on defining and valuing the role of LSAs—the minister continued to tell us that she and the Education Directorate were doing everything they could to find a good outcome for educators in bargaining.

Ultimately, this motion is about accountability. It is about not letting what has happened in the past disappear without reprisal. It is asking the minister to take responsibility for the actions of her directorate and the direction of them. It is calling on her to hold her directorate to account, to fiercely question those assumptions that do not ring true and put forward a vision for the ACT public school system that responds to what public schools and their people have been saying forever and a day.

There have been solid first steps taken in the announcement of reforms since the resourcing review. I want to make it really clear that the ACT Greens will continue to be committed to making sure these reforms are followed through on and that they provide tangible solutions to the problems which educators and students have long been telling us about. It is what they have been striking about outside this morning.

I reiterate that the last thing we need right now is destabilisation, because it appears that, in many ways, the government is taking this report seriously. It is my sincere hope that the next few changes happen for the better, under far less of a storm cloud and without the ACT Labor government being last to the party.

**MS VASSAROTTI**(Kurrajong) (11.33): I will be addressing this motion as the Greens spokesperson for housing. First and foremost, I would like to address this motion, recognising it as a failure in policy and the ambition of the government. Addressing the escalating housing crisis and the scourge of homelessness is something that I have dedicated most of my life to. It is truly a wicked problem, but it is not a problem without practical solutions.

The truth is that where we are at now is the result of decades of policy decisions that have seen housing as a vehicle to create wealth rather than provide a safe place to sleep for hardworking everyday Canberrans. Political decisions at both the national and the jurisdictional levels have resulted in a situation where public housing is on life support and in need of urgent intervention. We have been here for a long time. It is shameful. The thing that makes it even harder to stomach is that housing was not always like this, and, because of a combination of greed, bad governance and poor policy, we have lost all that was built in the wake of the economic consensus that oversaw massive public housing immediately post the Second World War.

We have seen an appalling proportional decline in public housing stock over the decades. Here in Canberra we have moved from the circumstance where living in a public home was normal to treating public housing as an option of last resort. The first settlers in this city all lived in public housing. Decade after decade, we have seen a reduction in the proportion of public homes in our city and, importantly, the running down of these homes, including chronic and ongoing underfunding of repairs and maintenance. Decades of neglect have created an issue that is now incredibly difficult to unravel, but, nevertheless, this issue must be targeted with a commensurate response.

At the end of the day, only one metric matters. If the government's Housing Strategy does not result in a zero next to the waiting list, then the response has been fundamentally inadequate. Everyone in this place knows that I held ministerial responsibilities in the last term of parliament around homelessness and housing services. Through this time, it was distressing to hold responsibilities on issues such as tenant experience and the waitlist, with no ability to respond to these issues personally, particularly around increasing stock or repairs and maintenance, as this was quarantined and held by the current minister.

What I learned during this time is that Housing ACT is full of dedicated and passionate people focused on looking after tenants and serving the community, but the policy and resource constraints make this almost impossible. They have been set up to fail by the current policy and funding constraints, and these failures have had a fundamental impact on people's lives. They are being forced to live in the unacceptable conditions that we have heard about today and often for extended periods. The over 3½ thousand Canberrans who need a home are told that, in most cases, they will need to wait for more than four years to even have the possibility of getting access to a safe and affordable public home.

As has been laid bare in the various reports from the Auditor-General and others that have been outlined today, the current approach is not meeting people's fundamental human rights and is not providing adequate care. Most of all, it is certainly not keeping up with the need of our community. While this problem has been decades in the making, there has been clear evidence of the need for urgent action for some time, and there is a need for the government to take ownership around these persistent gaps.

As the incoming Greens spokesperson for housing, my advocacy for the structural increases in public housing and the quality of public housing will be unapologetic, because now, more than ever, we need to take active steps to reduce the waiting list and ensure the territory becomes an active major player in the housing market. We must deliver security for our most vulnerable community members and for other hardworking families who are now finding themselves priced out of a stable place to call home.

The government needs to take responsibility for ongoing failures. Providing adequate funding has been an ongoing battle, with too little too late resulting in Housing ACT tenants being subjected to unacceptable hardship. There is a need for accountability and, importantly, there is a need to rebuild trust—that the issues that have been identified in report after report will be responded to structurally.

Let me be clear: the situation we are in right now is a political choice. It must be called

out for what it is. We need to ditch the status quo and endless debate and finally deliver a real public market of affordable rentals for everyday Canberra families. That is the vision that I will be fighting for, that is the vision the Greens will be fighting for, and I certainly hope it is a vision that the government will get on board with.

**MS BARRY** (Ginninderra) (11.39): I, too, rise to support this motion and I address my comments specifically on the abject mismanagement of public housing in the ACT. Disability and social housing are the most important civic interventions any government can make to support its most vulnerable citizens. It is a duty of care for our most vulnerable, and it ensures that their human rights are protected in the most basic ways. Failure to manage the provision of the most basic of human rights and needs, which include shelter and support at a time of greatest need, results in catastrophic consequences for our most vulnerable.

The consequences of homelessness in a location which has wide weather conditions like the ACT leaves rough sleepers at risk of medical conditions ranging from heat stroke to hypothermia. The lack of security leaves them at risk of violence, exploitation and trafficking. Couch surfers may face unacceptable choices, with some being forced into crime or prostitution to earn a bed for the night. In this context, this minister and this government have consistently failed those at risk of homelessness by not adequately investing in public and social housing—for decades.

But let me start with what I consider the most egregious of the minister's failures. The most egregious, Mr Speaker: public housing maintenance. What a debacle it has been. It is out of control, Mr Speaker. It is out of control. The Auditor-General, the ombudsman, and several committees in this place—even the courts—have found that the minister was failing Canberrans in her duty to maintain public housing. These findings are not in isolation; they point to a systemic problem. They have left vulnerable tenants waiting for repairs, navigating uncertainty and living in conditions that fall short of the standards they deserve.

After years of warning from an independent watchdog, Canberrans are entitled to ask why these issues persist and what accountability the government is prepared to accept for them.

I have spoken to many public housing tenants and few have good things to say about the minister. People have reported years of frustration trying to get basic housing maintenance performed. We have heard so much in this place about how difficult it is for people to have basic housing maintenance. Members in this place would recall that I spoke last year about a tenant with a disability, who had been forced to live in a residence for five years with a swamp in her lounge. She had black mould, she had a leaking roof, she had drains that were clogged. This was a place my staff and I could not even spend 10 minutes. We had to leave because we were so choked up because of the black mould.

I have visited some homes and sent photographs showing the deplorable state of some public housing. On one of these visits, the constituent told me, "Even animals are treated better."

I have received representation about a home where an eight-year-old boy cannot even

sleep in his own room because there is a hole in the roof, and he has been waiting for two years for it to be fixed. I have also heard an instance, which was raised to my attention, of a young child who is now sleeping in the lounge because his bedroom flooded and he has been waiting for the carpets to be replaced for over two years. Mr Speaker, even what you expect to be simple. I have a constituent who has been trying to complete a mutual housing swap for two years. I have raised this issue with the minister, the constituent has raised this issue with the minister, and nothing has been done to date.

This just shows a lack of care for the people who are raising these issues; a lack of care, Mr Speaker. And these are not even the extremes of example. People have told me of their frustration in dealing with the minister's office and the minister, reporting that they feel that they are paid lip service with no real action. I have made numerous representations to the minister about the worst of public housing issues brought to my attention and in my experience, I dare say, I am provided with a templated response that does not address the underlying issues that are claimed. And she says, in some responses, she has no power to intervene.

After 11 years, if the minister does not have the power that they need, then I am not sure we should be in this place. We should all go home and close this Assembly, because who has the power? I ask, who has the power?

Now, I do not know whether the minister has been incorrectly advised or whether the misleading information comes from her office but, at the end of the day, we expect that the minister would be across her brief and respond honestly to information requests from members of this Assembly.

I say I have completely lost confidence in the minister's ability to get this right, and her solution—insourcing maintenance—is already looking like it would be significantly more expensive than outsourced contracts with no guarantee that the outcomes of public tenants will improve. Based on the minister's track record, one will have no confidence that things will improve.

Let us not forget that the minister has had oversight of public housing, I say again, for 11 years. She clearly is the author of the deteriorating state of public housing and the failure to manage public housing maintenance contracts effectively. Her lack of understanding of the programs she has managed for 11 years is, frankly, staggering. Her inability to identify problems and to ensure that these are remedied make clear the need for her calling-out in the strongest of terms.

The minister has also demonstrated her inability to manage specialist disability accommodation. It blew my mind that it took the minister a decade to realise the program was not being properly managed. People wonder why she referred herself to the Attorney-General. That was because the issue was raised with my office, and she knew that, the following Monday during annual reports, I was coming with questions. So, it took my office to alert the minister, who had to finally move on it. I am hoping that the committee inquiry will get to the bottom of that mess.

It is the role of the minister to hold their directorate to account for the quality of the service and, while I acknowledge that the disability minister also faces some of the

criticism for the failure to inquire, the reality is that this government fumbled the ball on that program. The consequences are that people living disability have not had reasonable modifications done and the ACT budget is worse off by tens of millions of dollars. Shame.

In 2025 when the minister was appointed to this portfolio, we had nearly 12,000 public and social housing properties. In 2026 we are finally restoring the public and social housing portfolio to that level after a mass sell-off of public housing to pay off the first iteration of the light rail. In 2015, there was a waitlist of 2,000 families and a wait of around three years for standard applications. It is hardly a gold standard but sadly that is the standard we have come to expect from this minister. In 2026, we know that we now have 3,500 families on the waitlist and a five-year wait for standard applications. We know that the waitlist has grown by around 500 families in the last year or so.

The situation is getting worse by the day. The recent announcement of 450 public housing properties over the next four years barely addresses the increase in the waitlist over the last year. It does nothing to address the backlog, and nothing to address the needs of new families that may arise over the next four years.

So, I say to the minister and this government that they should be rightly condemned for the lack of planning and investment over a sustained period. They have continued to let down the most vulnerable in our community and are failing in their obligations under the Human Rights Act; their own act. The most fundamental right is housing.

Now, the minister's failures have not stopped there. Residents of social housing, particularly young people, need certainty of tenure so they can focus on rebuilding their young lives and focus on their education. In that context, the minister's refusal to provide funding certainty to the Braddon Youth Foyer, despite being aware it was our intention to continue that funding, created unnecessary uncertainty and fear for a vulnerable cohort of young people. This forced those young people to have to invest their time and energy fighting for their lives and supports to force an undertaking from the minister that their homes were going to be safe. I consider this an egregious breach of the minister's primary responsibility to provide and secure certain accommodation for vulnerable children and young people.

Canberrans are exhausted, Mr Speaker, and for that reason I support this motion and commend the censure to the Assembly.

**MS CHEYNE** (Ginninderra—Manager of Government Business, Attorney-General, Minister for Human Rights, Minister for City and Government Services and Minister for the Night-Time Economy) (11.49): I will confine my remarks to the education element. This is a motion that is asking the Assembly to censure a minister for findings that her own government has commissioned for a reform program that she is leading and for a system that pre-dates not just her ministry but self-government. Before members vote on that proposition, they are entitled to the history, and I particularly extend these remarks to the independent members, who may not be entirely aware of the exact story here.

No-one denies what the Smith review, the Dalgarno panel and the year 1 phonics results revealed. The questions are narrower and harder: is censuring one minister an honest

account of how those findings came to be? The architecture that the Smith review describes was not built by Minister Berry. It was not built by this government. It was not built in this century. In the 1970s, both Liberal and Labor commonwealth governments supported and enabled a new system which put responsibility for schools with each individual school.

It was born from an intense community campaign originating at Campbell primary. We were proud of it. The ACT was celebrated as the most devolved school system in the country, and researchers were still naming us the nation's leading adopter of devolved school management two generations later. Yet the record shows that, in the 1980s, the authority was already managing contraction—enrolment decline, closure and amalgamation options, and minimum viable school sizes. In 1989, self-government handed over a school system and a funding settlement that began shrinking almost as soon as the ink dried.

In 1997, the Carnell Liberal government introduced Enhanced School Based Management, which was anything but that—global budgeting and the wholesale devolution to schools of cleaning, grounds maintenance, IT, minor maintenance, energy, classroom materials and professional development. That was the year devolution stopped being an educational philosophy and became a savings measure, because the record shows it.

The department's own analysis in 1998 found 16 per cent “savings” in the two years after introduction, and 62 per cent of those savings came from one line—the administrative allowance, the very support that schools needed to run the functions that had been handed to them. By 1998, the Auditor-General found that some schools may not have the capacity to manage even mandatory maintenance.

Members may fairly ask: by the time the 2004 Watson evaluation found that the early efficiencies had reversed, with cleaning and utility costs rising and squeezing school budgets, 35 per cent of principals reporting that whatever school-based management gave them was offset by lost time as educational leaders, and naming “a continuing and inevitable tension” between central guidance and local autonomy—the precise tension now mapped—why didn't the government act then, or in the time since?

It is because every review chose recalibration over reversal, until now. The 2004 evaluation recommended more central support, but not less autonomy. The 2009 Allen Consulting review recommended additional autonomy for sustained high-performing schools. The 2010 Advancing Public Schools of Distinction framework operationalised that, and autonomy was expanded to all schools from 2012. In 2014, a Labor-Greens government signed a project agreement with the commonwealth—a Liberal commonwealth government, under Minister Pyne—whose stated purpose was to “increase the empowerment of local decision-making in government schools in the ACT”.

Autonomy was the consensus across parties and across decades. Undoing an operating system of 50 years is a lot slower than installing one. It means rebuilding central capability that was deliberately dismantled, renegotiating industrial settings, retraining a workforce that was hired under a different model, and funding all of it through a budget.

When the Smith review describes—and it is accurate, absolutely—principals doing the work of business managers, budgets that follow enrolments rather than need, and a contested relationship between schools and the centre, it is describing an operating system that schools have run on for 50 years. installed under commonwealth governments, both Labor and Liberal, extended by Assemblies of every composition, and renovated by Liberal, Labor and Labor–Greens governments alike.

It is very clear that the minister has not “dismissed warnings for years”. In 2018, the Future of Education Strategy was built from the largest education consultation that this territory has run. When the AEU’s workforce survey landed in 2021, the response was a joint taskforce with the union, established immediately. The directorate took responsibility for sourcing relief staff, and a pipeline of teachers was committed to the new school builds.

In 2023, the minister established the Dalgarno literacy and numeracy panel, by agreement with you, Mr Speaker. All eight of its recommendations were accepted, including a mandatory year 1 phonics check, and that was a public reversal of the minister’s earlier position. That is actually what accountability looks like. There was then the Smith review itself, commissioned by this minister, and released in full. Its hardest findings were published, not buried. Its central recommendation was accepted, with implementation to be designed with the schools, with the union and with the directorate, and reported back through this Assembly.

I do not argue that the Liberals raised issues, but raising issues does not prove they have the right diagnosis, the right solution or the institutional credibility to deliver reform. The real issue I have is with the Greens. The motion rewrites a co-governed history as if the Greens were spectators to it. It leaves out that Minister Rattenbury was education minister—not education spokesperson but education minister—in 2016. In 2018, this Assembly chose—and many of us were here—between an independent inquiry model that Ms Lee was pushing for and the minister’s Future of Education pathway. The Greens, in acknowledging the seriousness of the evidence, chose the minister’s pathway.

From 2020 to 2024, they were signatories to the governing agreement—not just the leader; every single member in this place from the Greens and Labor were signatories. There were three members who were holders of cabinet seats and there were pathways for cabinet disagreements. They were participants in implementation reporting, and all members had formal rights to seek information.

If the warnings were visible for years, it follows that they were visible inside a government that the Greens co-owned. “Greens in government”: we all know the slogan. The motion leans on individual ministerial responsibility while staying curiously silent about its partner under the Westminster conventions—collective responsibility. Collective responsibility means that members of a cabinet publicly own the decisions of that cabinet. Westminster conventions are not a coat that you check at the cabinet-room door and collect again on your way back to the crossbench. This is especially so when the parliamentary agreement had a formal pathway for Greens to reserve the right to vote against proposals.

Perhaps this motion would have made sense in the last sitting week, when no Greens member who had sat in cabinet, whether for four years or 12, was a member of this place. But now we do have a Greens member who was. That strikes me as remarkably odd.

If you believe that our schools need more, Mr Speaker—and this is where I implore the membership in this place—put your effort into scrutiny. The Smith implementation program and Dalgarno recommendations have the resources behind them, and reporting to the Assembly will continue. That is what action looks like: costed, accountable and on the record.

This censure—something from the playbook of the last term—costs nothing, but it funds nothing. It staffs no classroom and it repairs no roof. What it does is to ask this chamber to spend a morning assigning to one member a structure that took 50 years and every party in this room to build—including the party that turned devolution into a savings measure, and the party that sat in the cabinet that resourced it until 18 months ago.

Fifty years from now, someone will pull this file again—me, in the future. Let the entry for 2026 record that, when the hard findings finally landed on this minister's desk, and in front of this Assembly, she put them on the public record, accepted them in full and went to work; and that this Assembly, whatever the theatre on the day, supported her, not censured her.

**MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi) (11.59):** Hearing the Canberra Liberals and the Greens move a motion against the integrity of a government minister in a speech infused with all the moral outrage one can muster is certainly a blast from the past. It takes me back to last term, when it felt like one of these motions was being moved almost every other month, and I was compelled to support every one of them.

The truth is that I was never entirely comfortable with these motions. They have their place, of course. If a government minister were to engage in truly egregious conduct, it would be perfectly reasonable for parliament to censure that minister or to agree on a motion of no confidence. But these motions only have that impact if they are used sparingly and for the most serious matters. If they are used routinely, and especially if they are used for matters which may be worthy of criticism but not of condemnation, they lose their edge. They lose their edge both here in parliament and, more importantly, out in the community.

Most Canberrans may not pay close attention to the daily business of parliament, but most people do not actually believe that this Labor government is inherently corrupt. If the Liberals, the Greens or anyone else try to make that argument week after week, it does not persuade people that corruption exists. It just means they stop listening to you. That was the lesson that I learned last term. We moved motion after motion, and I never met a single Canberran who was persuaded to vote Liberal because of it. But I know we lost some support because of it. That is why, when I was the leader, we did not move a single censure or no confidence motion. I made it clear that the bar for these motions was high, and it had to be high, because our goal was not to smear the government but to build credibility with the community.

There was a lot of pressure to bring one against the health minister in early 2025, but I held firm; and, in retrospect, I was right to do so. I will note that a former member, Mr Rattenbury, often shared my view about the importance of credibility and working sensibly. We disagreed on lots of issues, but not on that one. I hope that the Greens do not lose sight of that, as they choose a new leader and work through the process of change and renewal. It takes a lot of energy, time and focus to build credibility, but it is essential work for any party, especially for an opposition party.

Unfortunately, today's motion shows that the opposition are not working to build their credibility. They are not thinking seriously about what voters want from the opposition or how they can deliver on those expectations. They are doing what is easy and flashy, hoping that enough of these stunts and enough of those headlines will somehow lead them to election glory. But hope is not a plan. It is not a plan in good times, but it is certainly not a plan in bad times, when the party's culture is toxic and the polls show that the federal party faces a wipe-out in the next 18 months, and when One Nation threatens to claim half of the Canberra Liberals' seats in 2028. I may not be a member of the opposition anymore, but I still believe that the ACT needs a strong, effective and credible opposition. It is essential for our democracy.

My plea to the opposition leader and the members of his team is not to go back to the failed tactics of the past. After seven defeats, we know what does not work. Put your time and energy into doing what does work—building your vision, building your policies and building your credibility, so that you can offer us a true alternative at the next election. That is what Canberra wants, expects and needs from you—to be the opposition that they deserve.

**MR COCKS** (Murrumbidgee) (12.03): There are clearly some people in this room who think that this is a stunt. It probably feels like we have just been waiting for this to launch at you to—

*Members interjecting—*

**MR COCKS:** We have been waiting, Mr Speaker. On this side of the chamber, we have been waiting for a very long time. We have been waiting a long time for a minister to turn around the outcomes for people on the ground. This is not just about politics. This is not about the people in this chamber. This is about real people. This is about children falling behind, who are not getting a day of schooling today because teachers are on strike. This is about the kids with dyslexia who are falling behind and not being picked up. This is about the parents who go into battle for their kids, only to see them fall behind. If they have the resources, maybe they can pull them out and get them across to a Catholic school or an independent school. Not everyone can do that.

There are real people on the receiving end of this minister's decisions. There are real people living in far-below-standard public housing. I have spoken about some of these examples. There are the people I have met at their doors—someone who has had to replace their three-year-old child's stuffed toys every three to six months because of the mould that is infesting them. There are houses with cracks in the walls that are so big that I could put my hand into them. There is water on the floors from leaks. There are people who have ongoing, chronic health conditions because of the state of the houses that they have been left to live in.

I am very grateful to the Manager of Government Business for her history lesson. I would love to draw on a couple of things there, because 50 years is what the Manager of Government Business suggested as being the time taken for these problems to develop. For 10 of those years, for a decade, it has been this minister, one minister—for 10 years. That is a decade. You cannot pretend that the warnings have not been sounded. The warnings have come loud and clear from this side of the chamber, but, just like today, they were dismissed by a minister who thought that it was all a stunt, and by a government who sees any opposition as a stunt.

It is about ignoring the reality on the ground because there is a political point to play and it is all about the political game. Well, it is not. There are real people suffering because of the decisions that a minister makes. It is not a short-term issue. It has taken a long time to get here. But, for a decade in education, this minister has held the portfolio. For over a decade in housing, this minister has held the portfolio. You cannot allow this to continue for year after year.

We have been waiting. We have been pretty patient. We have tried to be patient. Parents have been patient. Kids have been patient. Unions have been patient. Our educators and people in public housing are trying to be patient. People working in housing are trying to be patient. But, at a certain point, enough is enough and something has to change.

**MR PARTON**(Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (12.07), in reply: We are here today, standing up for Liberal values, which, obviously, means different things to different people. We appreciate the advice from Ms Castley. I would love to see what the people who voted for Ms Castley have to say when she says to them that the Assembly moved a motion to censure Ms Berry, “But I did my best to protect her.” I can kind of understand why the Manager of Government Business is so keen—

**Ms Cheyne:** Mr Speaker, a point of order.

**MR SPEAKER:** On a point of order, yes.

**Ms Cheyne:** It is on relevance. Mr Parton is not, seemingly, debating this censure motion. He is directing his remarks in a personal way to an independent member in this place.

**MR PARTON:** It has certainly been the practice in this place that, when we are debating motions, we talk about things that have been discussed in that debate. I am referring to matters that were discussed in the debate by members in this chamber.

**MR SPEAKER:** I think there is a broad-ranging debate. There are issues that have been raised across the debate. At this stage, there is no point of order, but I would remind you, Mr Parton, that this is a serious motion and to focus on the subject of the motion.

**MR PARTON:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. I spoke to Ms Berry last night after she became aware of this motion. She was none too pleased with the motion, and I can understand that. I understand completely that this motion is personally difficult for the minister, and I genuinely acknowledge that pain. It is difficult for us, too, but we believe

it must be done.

*Members interjecting—*

**MR PARTON:** It is difficult for us, too; you can—

*Members interjecting—*

**MR PARTON:** Well, I am sorry. I understand that it is difficult to not take things personally. I have heard nothing today that leads me to believe that anyone in this chamber should vote no to this motion. You cannot kick so many own goals without the coach calling you in and strongly advising that you must modify your game. I do not doubt Ms Berry's commitment to better outcomes. To some extent, that commitment makes the diabolical outcomes much worse, because Ms Berry tells us that she is running as fast as she can, but, clearly, she is not keeping up with the pack, on any measure.

It is no surprise that Mr Barr is not supportive of the censure motion. I appreciate the Chief Minister's outlining of ministerial responsibility under accepted Westminster principles. It is not the first time that Mr Barr has thrown public servants under a bus this week. We could accept Mr Barr's assertion that the minister is not absolutely in control of everything that happens in the directorate under her umbrella. We could accept his defence if there were two, three or four disastrous outcomes, but there have been many, articulated in no better form than by Ms Lee this morning.

The censure motion is not about one, two or three bad outcomes. It is about a pattern of warnings that have been sent to Ms Berry that she has ignored. It is no surprise to me that the Manager of Government Business is supportive of Ms Castley being the chair of the TCS committee.

**MS CLAY**(Ginninderra) (12.11), in reply: I want to speak briefly about ministerial accountability. We heard that there are two aspects to ministerial accountability. One is being accountable, accepting the evidence, agreeing that there is a problem and answering questions about it. That is one aspect of ministerial accountability. We have heard today that there has been a long pattern of evidence on housing and education, and that it was not accepted for a long time.

Purely in the housing context, just there alone, we had the first Ombudsman report in 2023. It is 2026 and we are still, with the 2026 inquiry that is underway at the moment, having the same complaints brought to us by tenants about absolutely systemic lack of maintenance, from a government that is a landlord and is not behaving as any landlord should, three years later, without any action having been taken. We have heard from many members here about all the times that they have asked simple and reasonable questions and have not had an answer, and we know that our community members have done the same. I would say that there is a lack of accountability there.

I am also concerned to hear ministers, when one of their colleagues holds a portfolio, trying to shift the blame onto people who were here years ago or decades ago. That is also a lack of accountability for what we are talking about here and now today. I am concerned about that.

I am also concerned in that the second aspect that we heard about ministerial accountability is leading reform or taking action to fix the problem. Nobody expects major problems and critical issues to be fixed overnight. That is not what anybody here has asked for. The minister who is responsible for education and housing today has taken some action—that is true—but part of it is about taking effective action. Again, I point to the fact that we had the first Ombudsman report in 2023, two Ombudsman reports, two Auditor-General reports, a breach of human rights in the Supreme Court, and another inquiry underway.

Again, even in education, we know why there is a strike today. It is because teachers have been trying for the last 10 months to engage on these issues; and, more than that, parents and teachers have been trying to engage on these issues for years. It is not merely about taking action or leading reform; it is about taking effective action and leading reform in a timely manner. That is why the Greens have decided that this is the moment to do this.

I would encourage the Labor government to reflect on the last censure motion, in which the transport minister did take accountability for the rollout of MyWay. It was very obvious to the people of Canberra what had happened in that program. It had been through a committee inquiry. I would say we are in a similar situation here. Everybody in Canberra has seen all these reports, inquiries and the action underway, and everybody is affected by this. Everybody has kids, friends or relatives in schools. They all know what is happening there. Everybody has contact with people who are living in public housing.

Please simply take accountability and answer the questions. If you do not know, say, “I don’t know,” and come back in a short period of time with an actual, clear answer about what you are doing next, and give us a plan to get out of here.

Question put:

That the motion be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 12

Noes 10

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

Question resolved in the affirmative.

**Sitting suspended from 12.17 to 2.00 pm.**

**Questions without notice****North Canberra Hospital—infrastructure—costs**

**MR PARTON:** My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, the government repeatedly points to the ACT size to justify the exaggerated costs of infrastructure builds such as the \$1.5 billion cost of the North Canberra Hospital redevelopment. For a comparable investment, Queensland's Coomera Hospital is being built with a capacity for up to 600 beds, while the North Canberra Hospital redevelopment will deliver just over 200 beds. Based on the government's own figures, this equates to approximately \$7.4 million per bed in the ACT, compared with around \$3.4 million per bed in Queensland.

Minister: on that comparison, can I ask why ACT taxpayers are paying more than double the cost per bed for substantially less hospital capacity?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I thank the Leader of the Opposition for the question, but I will correct him, as I did Ms Vassarotti yesterday. He is only talking about the 200 inpatient ward beds—in fact, it is 210. The media release, released quite some time ago, indicates, more than 300 treatments spaces: so that includes beds in the intensive care unit, beds in the emergency department, and beds in maternity and the special care nursery. I am not familiar with the type of hospital that Mr Parton was referring to in terms of the Queensland hospital, but this is a critical services building that will include an intensive care unit, an emergency department, maternity services, special care nursery and operating theatres—and all of those things are more expensive than building a standard ward bed. So I do not believe that this is an apples-to-apples comparison. I am very disappointed that, having had this announcement out for some time—it did not only come out in the budget yesterday—the Leader of the Opposition, who is also the shadow health minister, has not even understood the scale of this investment on the part of the ACT government, which is the biggest investment in health infrastructure since self-government.

**MR PARTON:** Minister, before approving this project, did cabinet receive advice comparing the North Canberra Hospital's cost per bed with comparable projects in other Australian jurisdictions? And if so, is it possible for that to be tabled?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I would note that we passed a 213A motion from Mr Parton yesterday that demanded a whole bunch of documents in relation to the north-side hospital. If the information that Mr Parton is after has been provided to the government, it will be included in that very comprehensive list of documents that the Assembly has already sought. I will say to Mr Parton that, to the extent that that information can be provided, it will be provided in response to that order for production of documents.

But I would also say that we have had Multiplex involved as a very early contractor involvement partner in this project. They are an experienced hospital build partner. I would also refute the beginning of Mr Parton's first question, where he said that we have put forward the small size of the ACT as a reason that health infrastructure costs more. I have never said that. I have absolutely no idea where Mr Parton is getting that information. The ACT is a small jurisdiction in terms of economies of scale, and that relates to health service delivery, not health infrastructure delivery. So can I just say that the agreement that we have with Multiplex and the work that we do with Multiplex

does enable us to do a budget comparison to understand constructability.

And I would also point out that comparing a brownfield development like this one that involves early work—that involves the demolition of buildings and relocation of existing services on a challenging site that already has utilities in place that will need to be moved—is very different to a greenfield hospital, and I suspect that is probably the comparison that Mr Parton is trying to draw.

**MR COCKS:** Minister, why do you expect Canberrans to pay roughly double the cost on your numbers when building something here in Canberra compared with elsewhere in the country?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** Obviously, Mr Cocks was unable to adjust his question in response to my first answer, but I will refer him to my first two answers.

### **Domestic and family violence services—men’s crisis accommodation**

**MS CASTLEY:** Mr Speaker, my question is to the Minister for the Prevention of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence.

Minister, what local crisis accommodation services are available to men who are escaping domestic and family violence?

**DR PATERSON:** I thank the member for the question. We were really excited to be able to support EveryMan in this year’s budget. EveryMan do fantastic work with vulnerable men in our community, they do work with men who have experienced domestic and family violence as well, and they also work with perpetrators of domestic family violence. They provide a pretty comprehensive counselling service and services for men. They also work with Housing ACT in supporting people in housing.

**MS CASTLEY:** Minister, what evidence has the government relied on in providing this level of crisis accommodation and help for men experiencing domestic violence?

**DR PATERSON:** I will take the crisis accommodation issue on notice; that sits outside of my portfolio responsibility.

**MR EMERSON:** Minister, what engagement have you had with the housing minister about homelessness experienced by men who are escaping violent situations but unable to access crisis accommodation?

**DR PATERSON:** We have had multiple discussions over the last couple of years about men and women who are experiencing crisis and needing accommodation, in a full range of different aspects from people experiencing homelessness, to people escaping domestic violence situations and to how we may support people coming out of the correctional system.

### **Teachers—certification fees**

**MS LEE:** My question is to the Minister for Education and Early Childhood. Minister, the *Canberra Times* reported that yesterday’s budget includes significant new and

increased fees for teachers. It states that teachers applying for or renewing their certification will face increases of up to 17 per cent, alongside the introduction of new charges for accreditation programs and the assessment of international qualifications. Minister, on the first full day that teachers are on strike in 15 years, can you please confirm for the Assembly if you increased the fees teachers have to pay just to teach?

**MS BERRY:** Sorry; what was the last bit—can I confirm it?

**MS LEE:** Yes.

**MS BERRY:** Yes.

**MS LEE:** Minister, at a time when teachers across the ACT are raising serious concerns about workloads and pay, why are you slugging them with increased fees, making it more expensive to be a teacher in our government schools?

**MS BERRY:** The Teacher Quality Institute provides professional development and learning and registers our teachers. It is as much about child safety as it is about a registration process and a professional learning and development organisation. Like every other professional, teachers deserve to be recognised for their craft—

**MR SPEAKER:** A point of order, Mr Parton?

**Mr Parton:** A point of order on relevance: the question was specifically about why you are slugging them with increased fees. It was not to explain the course to us.

**MR SPEAKER:** I think she is explaining the rationale behind the fee increase. She has some time to go, so I will allow the minister to continue.

**MS BERRY:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. The increase in the number of teachers that need to be registered in the ACT means that there are increased fees to provide the services that the Teacher Quality Institute provides, and it is because there are more issues around addressing complex matters in schools, which is the job of the Teacher Quality Institute, as the regulator. That takes more time and more staff. It is the professional organisation that provides teachers with support and recognition for their craft.

**MR PARTON:** Minister, why are you forcing teachers and would-be teachers to be further out of pocket during a cost-of-living crisis?

**MS BERRY:** We refer to those teachers as beginning teachers, not would-be teachers. It is appropriate to refer to beginning teachers in the appropriate way. “Would-be” sounds like wishful thinking.

*Members interjecting—*

**MR SPEAKER:** Members! Just answer the question, Minister.

**MS BERRY:** The increase in fees is a small amount of money compared to other professional organisations. I understand that the timing probably wasn’t perfect, given the industrial action that the teachers are taking. However, the decision to increase fees

was made a long time before today.

### **Teachers and school staff—enterprise bargaining**

**MISS NUTTALL:** My question is to the Minister for Education and Early Childhood.

Minister, my colleague Mr Braddock regrets he cannot be here in person to ask this question because, as a proud parent who supports the school strike, he is absent from the chamber parenting today. Meanwhile, the AEU and their hardworking members would not have filled the whole of Civic Square with red for their strike today if the government was meaningfully coming to the table.

Minister, when will your directorate engage substantively with the AEU's full list of claims across the two enterprise agreements?

**MS BERRY:** They are.

**MISS NUTTALL:** Minister, will you have an answer for school assistants on their list of claims by the time the School Assistant Classifications Framework Review is complete, and how long will that be?

**MS BERRY:** The administration part of the core agreement that the ACT government has been negotiating is completed. That will be put to the ACT government public service in due course.

**MS CLAY:** Minister, will you apologise to the students, educators, LSAs and parents for letting things get to the point that every public school had to close for a full day?

**MS BERRY:** I already have, but I am happy to do that again. I know that it is frustrating for families and that it disrupts our community. Our schools play such an important role and are integral to every part of our community life. I know that it has been a difficult time for everybody involved, particularly teachers and students but also families, carers and others who are engaged with our school communities.

I am hoping that we can get to a point with the Education Union that this kind of industrial action will not have to happen again. But, of course, unions and their members are able to take industrial action to further their cause. So I respect the right of the union to do that—although I accept that it has been disruptive to everybody. I have already apologised publicly, and I am very happy to apologise again in this place.

### **Clubs ACT—political donations**

**MR EMERSON:** My question is to the Leader of the Opposition. Mr Parton, I noticed on the gift disclosures published by Elections ACT that Clubs ACT has made multiple cash donations to the Canberra Liberals in recent months for the first time since 2020. Have you personally accepted any donations or gifts in kind from Clubs ACT or any other gambling industry entities during your time as Leader of the Opposition?

**MR SPEAKER:** Just before you respond, I want to check that it is in order, because the standing orders are pretty clear about what can be asked and to whom about what.

I am not sure this fits in with that Mr Emerson, so I will seek some advice as to whether that question is in order.

The advice is that standing order 116:

Questions may be put to a Member, not being a Minister, relating to any bill, motion, or other public matter connected with the business of the Assembly, of which the Member has charge.

Given that it is a public declaration, the advice I have received is that it is in order, Mr Parton. So over to you.

**MR PARTON:** Thank you and I thank the member for the question!

**Mr Barr:** Do you?

**MR PARTON:** Yes, I do! I would say, Mr Speaker, that the fundraising donation scenario for the Liberal Party is run at arms-length to members and although I am on the management committee and I could seek to have a look at all the donations, I am not specifically aware of donations that have come from Clubs ACT other than pertaining to the bill that is on the notice paper this week. I guess you could say that the sports roundtable we held at the Southern Cross Club at Woden would technically fall in that particular bill as a donation in kind from that club, whether it was to us—well, I guess we were the organisers of the event. So in answer to your question, no. I can stand here and say I am not aware of donations from Clubs ACT that have been made to the party in recent weeks.

**MR EMERSON:** As Leader of the Opposition, have you been lobbied to slow down or block potential forthcoming gambling harm reduction measures?

**MR PARTON:** I thank the member for the question. I reject—no, I am not going to reject the premise!

Look, you know, we have held views. I have certainly been the holder of the portfolio of gaming and racing for most of my time here in this place, and in that time my position has not changed one iota. So I would suggest that perhaps we would have to track back and have a look at lobbying that had been done prior to me being elected. So my response to the question is my position in that space has not changed one tiny little bit in the time that I have been elected.

**Mr Emerson:** Point of order: under standing order 118AA responsiveness to the question. The question was not whether Mr Parton's position had changed, but as Leader of the Opposition—so recently—have you been lobbied to slow down or block potential forthcoming gambling harm reduction measures?

**Mr Cocks:** On the point of order, given the clarification that we have just heard, I am not convinced that the supplementary question is actually in order in the standing orders.

**MR SPEAKER:** Well, interestingly, under 118AA, Mr Cocks, of which you are an

expert, I can only direct a minister to respond and Mr Parton is not a minister. So I do not uphold the point of order on a technicality, Mr Emerson.

### **Public housing—stock**

**MS CLAY:** My question is to the minister for housing. The *ACT Housing Strategy Year 7 Report Card* confirms the government's commitment to an additional 1,100 homes by 2030, which will take the public housing portfolio to 13,200 homes. Last Friday, the government announced a public housing pipeline with \$364 million over four years to deliver 450 new homes. You called it a “generational investment” but, minister, it is not generational investment; there is no funding for the other 650 new public homes that need to be built by 2030. When will you announce the funding for the remaining 650 new public housing dwellings that need to be built by 2030 to meet your commitment?

**MS BERRY:** That will be a decision for government in future budget processes and, of course, the government does not announce future policy in the Assembly, in question time.

**MS CLAY:** Now that the territory is \$250 million better off because the commonwealth is funding housing infrastructure works, when will you spend the extra \$250 million you saved, on providing more public housing?

**MS BERRY:** I refer the member to my previous answer.

**MS VASSAROTTI:** What is a “government owned HAFF 3 dwelling”? If it is managed and operated by a community housing provider, will it be leased to public housing tenants?

**MS BERRY:** It will depend. But if it is government owned housing and it is leased to a community housing provider, then it will likely be leased at affordable rates to a community housing tenant.

I am not sure if that is the answer that Ms Vassarotti is after, so I will take some of that on notice and provide more clarification around that.

### **Budget—economy**

**MR WERNER-GIBBINGS:** My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, can you provide us an update on what the 2026-2027 budget says about the ACT economy?

**MR STEEL:** I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for the question—the first question about the budget for this question time. Mr Speaker, the ACT economy is strong and resilient, despite global headwinds and the impact of Donald Trump's war in the Middle East.

The ACT economy continues to grow faster than the rest of the country and has now enjoyed 29 consecutive years of economic growth. Strong economic growth is forecast to continue. While growth will soften in the immediate term due to the economic conditions from the war, we do expect that growth will remain strong, with the GSP forecast to grow by 3¼ per cent from 2026-27.

Importantly, the ACT economy is supported by low unemployment, strong wage growth and high workforce participation, and that means more Canberrans staying in the workforce and earning more. While inflation will be higher in the first half of the calendar year 2026, the ACT will continue to have lower inflation than other jurisdictions around the country.

**MR WERNER-GIBBINGS:** Treasurer, how is the government supporting continued economic activity and growth in the city?

**MR STEEL:** The ACT government will support continued economic activity and growth through continued economic reform. As we have repeatedly said, this is a budget for housing. On the one hand, we are undertaking micro-economic reforms to enable more homes and more housing choice and reforming the planning system. We are streamlining building processes and delivering on our construction productivity agenda and enabling more homes to be built for Canberrans sooner. This includes more work on tax reform and eliminating stamp duty for first home buyers, for people buying off the plan, for turn-key units and for pensioners as well.

Housing is a fundamental economic enabler, and secure affordable housing provides the economic basis for growth. What we are doing through this budget is supplying a massive pipeline—a massive new pipeline of non-market housing that will support our construction industry. It is the first stage of a massive investment in public, community and affordable housing—450 new homes through the public housing pipeline and over 1,000 new community and affordable homes through community housing providers. And it is off the back of a massive growing and renewing housing program, with construction still underway on new dwellings there.

The budget also supports investments in a range of important parts of the economy through investments in tourism, the arts and sport. We will continue to make sure that Canberra is a fantastic place to visit, to work and in the creative industries and support continued economic diversification.

**MS TOUGH:** Treasurer, how does the ACT compare to other jurisdictions?

**MR STEEL:** I thank Ms Tough for her supplementary. The budget shows that we will continue to grow faster than all other Australian jurisdictions, reflecting a strong local economy supported by continued public investment. The ACT continues to have lower inflation than other jurisdictions. The ACT has one of the highest workforce participation rates in the country, with low unemployment and low underemployment, and the ACT labour market continues to outperform the national average. The participation rate is one of the key drivers of success in our economy. We are relatively young; we are a well-educated populace, with a large proportion of Canberrans in the workforce, and Canberrans continue to enjoy the highest wage growth in the country.

We see that the ACT continues to track below national inflation. This is not by accident. It is also because of active investment that our government has made in renewable energy—reducing power prices—and in intervention in the housing market, particularly around rent setting, which has reduced the rate of rent growth compared to other jurisdictions.

## **Stirling oval—facilities**

**MS CARRICK:** Mr Speaker, my question is to the Minister for Sport and Recreation.

I refer to the ongoing concerns raised by multiple community sporting clubs—including the Molonglo Juggernauts Football Club, Weston Creek Molonglo Cricket Club and Weston Creek Molonglo Wildcats—regarding the condition of the Stirling enclosed oval. Despite paying user fees comparable to modern facilities such as the Gungahlin and Woden enclosed ovals, Stirling continues to face significant safety, maintenance and infrastructure issues. These include hazardous playing surfaces, deteriorating cricket facilities, inadequate amenities, pest infestations and a lack of suitable spectator infrastructure. Clubs pay up to \$12,000 to hire the grounds, and they expect the grounds to be suitable for games. However, in addition to other issues, Stirling enclosed oval has a scoreboard that does not work. These problems have been raised with the ACT government for over a decade without meaningful resolution.

Minister, why are community sporting clubs at Stirling enclosed oval being charged fees comparable to premium facilities when the standard of infrastructure amenities and maintenance is demonstrably inferior.

**MS BERRY:** I thank Ms Carrick for her question and for her advocacy for the Juggernauts. I have heard very clearly that there are some issues at the Stirling oval, and I have raised this with the Sport and Recreation sports field maintenance team. At the roundtable that Mr Parton held last week, one of the issues they raised specifically was around the disposal of pads and meds in their changerooms—that there was only one disposal unit available. I understand that that issue has already been resolved. So the team, once they found out that it was a concern, has immediately acted on it. I am just following up on the other issues that I am aware of following the meeting, but I will take Ms Carrick's question on notice about the other issues that she has raised in here today and just check that they are being acted on as well.

Most sports clubs know—and I think the Juggernauts know—that there is an on call ranger every weekend that all clubs can contact for any issues that arise, which might be emergency issues that need to be addressed over the weekend. Often those requests go to the ranger. The ranger can usually repair them or address them pretty quickly. If those issues have not been addressed in a reasonable timeframe, then of course that is unacceptable. Depending on the on the actual nature of them, some of them might be more significant and need more work, which will take more time, but I will take that on notice the detail and provide further advice to the Assembly.

**MS CARRICK:** Minister, will the government fix or provide an appropriate scoreboard for the Stirling enclosed oval?

**MS BERRY:** I will take that question on notice. On the ownership of the scoreboard, sometimes on sports grounds, the scoreboards are not owned by the government—for example, the Magpie scoreboard at Kippax is owned by the Magpies Club. Whilst the sport and rec team can assist the clubs in resolving the issues that they might have with repairs, sometimes it is not owned by the ACT government. So I will just take that part of the question on notice and check that that can be resolved.

**MR EMERSON:** Minister, will you commit to taking immediate action to address the current safety, maintenance and pest control issues at Stirling enclosed oval to ensure the oval is fit for community use?

**MS BERRY:** I thank Mr Emerson for his interest, and I have already done that as a matter of priority following the meeting that Mr Parton held last week. I took copious notes and all of them I sent off to—

**Mr Parton:** Thanks for coming.

**MS BERRY:** Thanks for inviting me.

I sent all of the notes off to the sport and rec team to be addressed. As I said, some of them have already been addressed as a matter of urgency, and I will get on to the rest of them in due course.

### **Public housing—stock**

**MS BARRY:** My question is to the Minister for Homes, Homelessness and New Suburbs. Minister, the ACT Labor government's budget revealed that confidence in Housing ACT has collapsed, with a historical low of one-third of respondents being dissatisfied with public housing. Minister, how will reducing client service visits from 11,000 per annum to 5,800 in the next financial year actually help to achieve the priority of improving the delivery of tenancy-centric public housing services?

**MS BERRY:** As Ms Chiaka Barry might know, those house visits are done in pairs now due to safety concerns and they are targeted at people who need them most. That does not mean people cannot get in touch with Housing ACT, Programmed or others via phone or via email. That contact can always occur—even going into the shopfront in Belconnen. But it means that we take the safety of Housing ACT staff seriously, so that work needs to be done with two people at a time attending a Housing site. That does not mean that people cannot call and request a visit of their own or get in touch with their housing manager or anyone at Housing ACT. That contact will not stop.

**Mr Cocks:** Mr Speaker, a point of order under 118AA: the question specifically related to the nexus between a reduction in client services and the priority of improving the delivery of tenant-centric public housing services. I do not believe the minister has actually been relevant to that question.

**MR SPEAKER:** I tend to agree. Mr Cocks. I think the minister's answer explained why they had reduced the number of visits—to go in pairs—but did not actually explain what effect that would have, which was the nub of the question. So, Minister, I would ask whether, under 118AA, you could provide a response.

**MS BARRY:** Minister, you talk about providing stable, long-term and affordable housing, so how does investing in only 450 new public housing units and 50 social and affordable housing units over four years meet the demand increase of 500 per annum?

**MS BERRY:** Sorry—I did not catch the end of that question. Could you repeat it?

**MS BARRY:** Sure. I will start from the beginning. Minister, you talk about providing stable, long-term and affordable housing. How does investing in only 450 new public housing units and 50 social and affordable units over four years meet the demand increase of 500 per annum?

**MS BERRY:** I thank the member for the question. The ACT Labor Party has committed to 5,000 affordable social and public housing properties; 1,000 of those will be in public housing. We have made a commitment in this budget to buy and build 450. Our commitment is still for 1,000 by 2030, as well as adding affordable rentals and community housing to that work of an additional 4,000 homes.

**MR CAIN:** Why is the Housing Crisis Support Fund, which seeks to replace the Rent Relief Fund, only funded for the next two years?

**MS BERRY:** It is working through a new program. Previously, the fund was for paying rent only. This new fund provides other kinds of supports. It may include rental fees, but it also may include other emergencies or support that a tenant might require at a time. It could include whitegoods replacement, it could include repairs to their home, and it could also include rent arrears. It is about trying and testing that fund to make sure that it is meeting the needs of the people who need that support.

### **Public housing—stock**

**MS VASSAROTTI:** My question is to the Minister for Housing. Minister, the public housing waitlist is growing faster than this government is building public homes. In a rapidly-growing housing crisis, public housing becomes more important, not less. We have seen in just 16 months—between November 2024 and March of this year—the waitlist surging from 2,975 to a staggering 3,551 applications. Yet the government announced last month that your plan is to increase public housing stock to by only 1,271 homes by the end of 2030. At this rate, the growth of this waitlist will continue to outpace this sluggish delivery timeline. Given this, when will the government deliver a real plan to shrink the public housing waitlist, with a stated objective of bringing that list to zero?

**MS BERRY:** I thank Ms Vassarotti for her question, and I note her interest in housing and her time in the ACT government in supporting people who are experiencing homelessness in the ACT. We already have a plan, and I have already outlined the 5,000 homes by 2030. Not everybody on the public housing waitlist needs public housing. Some of the people who are on the waitlist have also applied for community housing in addition to public housing. So community housing might actually be a better support or a better fit for them.

Freeing up and providing more affordable rentals across the city will also have a huge impact on the waitlist. I spend a lot of time worrying about the time on the waitlist. That is why the ACT government has made the significant contribution to investing in and increasing the amount of public housing here in the ACT—more than ever before. I note that there is more work to be done. The partnerships that we have with the federal government, community housing providers as well as private developers and others in building homes for people who need them have been an important part of this program

of works.

What we have committed to is ambitious but it is also reasonable, responsible and achievable—and I think that is the main thing. We do not want to create a mythical pipeline that cannot be delivered. This pipeline can be delivered.

**MS VASSAROTTI:** What, if any, modelling is this government doing to determine how many public homes will be needed to bring the waitlist to zero as demand increases?

**MS BERRY:** We work very closely with ACTCOSS and other housing organisations to understand the data and waitlists and the information that they hold as experts in this area as well as census data that we will all be participating in over the next 12 months or so to understand the situation going forward. Of course, we are not the only place that is experiencing a housing crisis; the whole country is experiencing this. It is being exacerbated by the long tail of COVID and conflict overseas. That is a challenge for everybody. We are seeing that play out in our housing list, which is why we have made an ambitious announcement—an announcement, as I said, that we can achieve—that is reasonable and is a responsible commitment to make.

**MISS NUTTALL:** Minister, how can you justify your conservative housing target when families are facing homelessness and crushing housing pressure right now?

**MS BERRY:** I do not agree that it is conservative. It is ambitious. If anybody has paid any attention to the housing space over the last five years, they would know that it has been incredibly challenging. Working with industry, with organisations like the Property Council, and understanding where our construction industry is and what they can deliver, is where we come to this pipeline of works. It is not as simple as just pulling a figure out of the air and saying 10,000 homes by 2030; they do have to be delivered and they have to be delivered in a way that meets the needs of our tenants—and that is what the government's commitment is about.

### **Budget—debt**

**MR COCKS:** My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, last year's budget said that the territory would take out \$1.64 billion in new borrowings in 2025-26. This year's budget now says that the estimated outcome is \$3.1 billion. That is an increase of \$1.46 billion in new borrowings in a single year. Why did the government need to borrow almost one and a half billion dollars more than it told the Assembly last year, and who approved that decision?

**MR STEEL:** I thank the member for his question. We continue to undertake borrowing where necessary to support the needs of the ACT budget and the infrastructure program. We would act, going to market for borrowing, based on the advice of Treasury about the best time to enter the market and whether there are any other semi-governments in the market. Obviously there has been an uncertain period at this particular point in time with the war in the Middle East, so advice has been crucial to make sure we go out at the right time to make sure that we get the best possible bond rates for the Australian Capital Territory.

We have been very clear that we believe that borrowing is a responsible decision for our government to take to invest in generational infrastructure. But what we have also set out in the budget is a return to a cash operating surplus, consistent with the fiscal strategy that we set out last year, and what that means is that over time we will see more of the infrastructure program funded through a greater proportion of cash in addition to borrowing.

**MR COCKS:** Treasurer, was any part of this additional borrowing brought forward because Treasury was concerned about higher future borrowing costs, refinancing risk, investor appetite or the risk of a further credit rating downgrade?

**MR STEEL:** I will take that on notice and see whether I can come back with some further information about the specific advice that they provided at the time. But we do act on that expert advice about the best time to go out to the market and it obviously depends on a range of different factors that are affecting the bond market at a particular point in time. The objective is to make sure we get the best possible bond rates for the territory so that we can reduce the amount of interest we are paying. As bonds mature, we may then need to issue new bonds to be able to provide the debt finance required to fund the ongoing infrastructure needs of the territory and other costs.

**Mr Cocks:** Point of order on relevance, Mr Speaker. The question was in relation to new borrowings, which is a separate line item entirely to refinancing of existing borrowings.

**MR SPEAKER:** I think that the minister said he is taking it on notice and then was just providing additional information. That is my understanding, so I do not think there is a point of order.

**MR PARTON:** Treasurer, what was the net cost to ACT taxpayers of carrying these additional borrowings early, after offsetting any interest earned on cash balances, and could you table the advice explaining whether this was routine debt management or a response to a worsening budget and credit risk?

**MR STEEL:** I will take that on notice.

### **Budget—electricity prices**

**MR COCKS:** My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, your budget claims to address cost-of-living pressures but it includes a 6.2 per cent increase in utility prices. According to the government's own household modelling, a pensioner in Belconnen will pay \$322 more per year in utility costs, and a single parent in Banks will pay an additional \$385. How can you claim to be helping with the cost of living while increasing the costs of essential services and utilities?

**MR STEEL:** I thank the member for his question. What is shown by those cameos that we transparently published in the budget is the impact of electricity price setting. Obviously, that is informed by the work of the independent regulator, the ICRC. And, yes, electricity prices will increase in the new financial year. That is the case, but what we have also seen in previous years is our government's astute commitment around renewable energy in the territory, and that our commitment to 100 per cent renewable

energy has shielded Canberrans from elevated electricity prices in the past.

There is some additional cost being passed on to Canberrans for electricity prices; the cost of running the electricity network. That is independently assessed by the ICRC and they make their determination about that.

But in the budget, we have continued to provide targeted cost-of-living relief for those who need it most. That has included continued investment in supporting households with energy costs through the Home Energy Support Program and a range of other measures. We will continue to provide support to those who are doing it tough. The budget also provides new supports which did not exist before, including a new \$250 payment for those experiencing housing crisis, and a range of other supports. Those can be found in the *Cost of Living Statement* in the budget, on page 151.

**MR COCKS:** Treasurer, is it your progressive policy approaches which mean these increases will disproportionately affect pensioners, single parents and low-income households?

**MR STEEL:** I thank the member for his question. Of course, our government has, in recent budgets, made the decision to specifically provide support for utilities through the electricity, gas and water rebate. We have increased the amount of the rebate and we have applied it to more people around the territory. 40,000 people receive that rebate, in recognition that they need a little bit of extra support when paying for energy and water bills.

There is no doubt that the cost of electricity is going up. That was independently set by the ICRC, but we have provided a range of cost-of-living relief in this budget. That includes helping people to provide support for bringing down energy costs. We also continue to support renters to bring down their home energy costs through energy efficiency measures.

**MR CAIN:** Treasurer, why are everyday Canberrans bearing the cost of your uncontrolled spending and debt?

**MR STEEL:** I reject the premise of the question, Mr Speaker. I point the opposition to the budget, where we have continued the difficult decisions that we made in the last budget and which they did not support—responsible measures to constrain the growth of the public service; to focus on government priorities; to re-set the infrastructure program to save the budget over \$700 million, to make sure it is deliverable and sustainable.

We have taken a huge range of decisions through multiple budgets, now, to make sure that expenditure growth is sustainable. We have also made decisions on the revenue side of the budget.

We have been measured in this budget, given the uncertain economic conditions that are affecting both businesses and households. The decisions we have made are measured, recognising the cost-of-living pressure that households are under but also the extra costs that are being borne by government during this time. This has meant that we have also been measured in what we can provide, in terms of additional cost-of-living

relief. But we have provided relief. It is extensive and it is targeted, to make sure that it is sustainable.

### **Kingston Arts Precinct**

**MR MILLIGAN:** My question is to the Chief Minister. The government has announced that the Kingston Arts Precinct art building will now be staged over the coming years. The site was first identified as a potential site for an arts precinct back in 2003. ACT Labor has promised to deliver it at every election since.

Chief Minister is the Kingston Arts Precinct the longest running broken election promise in the history of self-government?

**MR BARR:** No.

**MR MILLIGAN:** Can the Chief Minister confirm that this 23-year-old project will suffer no more delays, and can the Chief Minister confirm what is the longest broken election promise?

**MR BARR:** That is actually two questions, Mr Speaker! In relation to the Kingston Arts Precinct, a land release is imminent that will support both the first stage of the precinct being car parking and housing for artists, and future stages will be announced in future budgets.

**MS LEE:** Chief Minister, what consultations have your government undertaken with the local arts community before the decision took place, and what was the feedback?

**MR BARR:** Yes, the relevant agencies have been engaging both with arts stakeholders and the broader community around that area, noting that the decision to undertake the structured car parking build first was to ensure that all of the businesses in the entire Kingston Foreshore precinct who rely upon that car parking are not disrupted by a significant loss of car parking supply. So that is why the project is being staged in the way it is. New car parking will be built and operational before the existing surface car parking that is the balance of that site is developed.

### **Yerrabi electorate—infrastructure**

**MR MILLIGAN:** Mr Speaker, my question is for the Treasurer.

The government budget will delay infrastructure projects for health, emergency services and sports in my electorate of Yerrabi. This includes the longstanding commitment to build indoor courts in Casey and playing fields in Throsby. I also refer the Treasurer to the Chief Minister's comments about focusing on maintaining and replacing the infrastructure in the parts of Canberra built during the city's rapid 50-year expansion between 1930 and 1980.

Is it now the government's policy to abandon local infrastructure and new suburbs altogether?

**MR BARR:** I will take that question, as it relates to infrastructure, Mr Speaker. The

government is intending to complete the projects already underway in the member's electorate before commencing new ones. We remain committed to delivering the projects that we took to the election in our Gungahlin plan, and we will be doing so in this parliamentary term.

**MR MILLIGAN:** Chief Minister, why has your government chosen to delay local infrastructure in the electorate of Yerrabi?

**MR BARR:** I answered that in my answer to the first question. There is no capacity to complete the projects at this point until the existing project pipelines across the entire infrastructure program are complete. It is quite simple. We need to pause to complete all of the works in progress, which are the largest ever in the history of the territory. We are at peak infrastructure this year and next—the two biggest programs ever. We are not in a position to start major new projects until those works are complete. The projects in the member's electorate are priorities for the government and will be considered for funding in next year's budget and the budget the year after.

**MR PARTON:** Chief Minister, why is your government expecting people in Yerrabi to pay higher taxes and charges but receive less infrastructure?

**MR BARR:** We are not.

### **Housing affordability—housing supply**

**MS TOUGH:** My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, how is the ACT government supporting its commitment to enable 30,000 more homes by 2030 through the 2026-27 ACT budget?

**MR STEEL:** I thank Ms Tough for her question. Our ACT Labor government is delivering \$770 million of investment in new and expanded housing initiatives in the 2026-27 budget. We are releasing land to support around 4,300 dwellings over the next financial year. We are improving project feasibility by introducing a time-limited 50 per cent reduction in the codified lease variation charge for eligible missing middle developments in low-density zones. We are also investing in the planning and enabling work needed to unlock supply, and this includes the residential uplift program which focuses on increasing housing around local centres and along major transport corridors.

We are focused on continued planning reform through transit-oriented development, with work on the Southern Gateway underway as well as work to implement the existing City and Gateway Urban Design Framework and support uplift around key high-frequency light rail and bus stops. At the same time, we are also enabling more mid-rise and diverse housing in well-located areas, supported by improved planning tools and a stronger evidence base. We are also bringing in a new integrated planning and transport strategy together to ensure that housing growth is aligned with the infrastructure and transport needed to build a compact, connected and efficient city. Together, these measures will help bring more homes online in the right locations and at the right time for Canberrans, with support from the government.

**MS TOUGH:** Treasurer, what steps has the government taken to progress its commitment to support 5,000 more community, public and affordable homes by 2030?

**MR STEEL:** I thank Ms Tough for the supplementary. Our government is committed to ensuring that every Canberran has access to secure and affordable housing, including the most vulnerable in our community. This budget is putting Labor values into action by significantly increasing our investment in community, public and affordable housing. There is \$360 million in the budget to deliver an additional 450 housing dwellings, which contributes to our commitment to deliver an additional 5,000 public, community and affordable homes by the end of 2030. We are also investing \$90 million in capital funding to meet our target of 1,000 property renewals and portfolio growth of 400 public houses under the old Growing and Renewing program by June 2027, supporting better housing stock for existing tenants, as well as growing the housing portfolio overall, supported by commonwealth funding. After 10 years of a policy vacuum under the federal Liberals, we are using programs like the Social Housing Accelerator program and the HAFF to make sure we can deliver those homes.

We are investing more than \$180 million to uplift our public housing repairs and maintenance program, which will prioritise essential repairs and upgrades to vacant properties so that we can return them to being available for Canberrans that need them. I thank Minister Berry for her advocacy throughout the budget process in securing this additional funding for public housing, new homes and repairing the homes that we have in our stock. We are also investing in supporting the delivery of crisis and transitional housing for vulnerable cohorts facing homelessness, under the commonwealth's national Housing Australia Future Fund. And we are backing our community housing sector by providing the finance guarantees required for projects under the HAFF, in the order of \$650 million.

**MR WERNER-GIBBINGS:** Treasurer, why is investing in the supply of more homes to Canberrans so important?

**MR STEEL:** I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for his supplementary. Investing in housing supply is essential because it goes directly to affordability and it goes directly to the cost of living. This is the largest cost faced by households, and we are making a massive investment in housing to support households with that major cost. It is also important for the future of our city as it continues to grow to 700,000 people by 2050. When supply does not keep pace with demand, we see increased pressure on house prices and rents, making it harder for Canberrans—particularly young people, families and key workers—to find homes close to jobs and services in the community. That is why our target of enabling 30,000 homes by 2030 is so important. And, by investing in enabling more housing choice through planning reform and investing in more well-located homes, we can improve affordability over time, reduce pressure on households, make better use of existing infrastructure, and also make sure that people can live where and how they want to live, in more suitable accommodation. Ultimately, increasing housing supply is critical to keeping Canberra livable, inclusive and sustainable as our city grows.

**Mr Barr:** All further questions can be placed on the notice paper.

## **Aged care—Burrangiri Aged Care Respite Centre—update**

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH** (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health,

Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (2.55), by leave: I am providing a statement updating the Assembly on the matter of ACT respite care arrangements. This statement is in response to the motion introduced by Ms Carrick on 26 March 2026. The document tabled yesterday also relates to this.

As the Assembly is aware, there are ongoing efforts to negotiate the future of aged care respite care arrangements in the ACT, including the future of Burrangiri. As we are considering the sustainable future options for respite care, we are in conversation with aged care service providers, the Save Burrangiri Action Group and the commonwealth government, which has committed \$10 million in capital expenditure for respite in the ACT.

On 30 April, I attended a meeting regarding the future of Burrangiri and respite care in the ACT, convened by Senator Gallagher with Senator Pocock, Ms Carrick and representatives of the Save Burrangiri Action Group along with representatives of the commonwealth department and health minister's office. The discussion regarding future respite arrangements continues to be an open and evolving one, with the aim that the proposed solutions will offer the best outcome for the ACT community.

Burrangiri Aged Care Respite Centre continues to provide planned and emergency overnight respite, post-hospital convalescent care, and day respite services for older people—those 65 years and older—in the ACT, with the extension of the Burrangiri contract in 2025 for two years to the end of June 2027. The Salvation Army continues to provide quality care while navigating the commonwealth's new aged care reforms. In this context, we welcomed the commonwealth government's announcement that it would open a grant to enable the Salvation Army to apply to be a respite provider under the Commonwealth Home Support Program.

The motion on 26 March called on the ACT government to seek independent advice to confirm the appropriate National Construction Code classification of Burrangiri, as Ms Carrick was questioning the government's assessment that a new or refurbished facility for this purpose would need to be class 9c. In response, the Health and Community Services Directorate engaged an independent consultant to undertake a transparent assessment of the appropriate National Construction Code/Building Code of Australia classification for the facility. It has now received the resulting report, which was included in the papers tabled in this place yesterday. I apologise for not speaking yesterday, we were expecting it to be tabled today.

The methodology used for the assessment was to first outline and compare class 3 and class 9c National Construction Code requirements and the cohort of people expected to be present in each type of facility. The Burrangiri building analysis report describes the two classes as follows. Class 3: the intended use is residential; typical users are workers, tourists and students, and occupants are considered independent and can typically self-evacuate a building. Class 9c: the intended use is residential care; typical users are aged care residents, and occupants are dependent and likely to require assistance to evacuate a building.

Using the description of the service and cohort of people that currently attend Burrangiri, the assessment sets out the classification of Burrangiri, and the reasons for this classification. The independent consultant has assessed that if the Burrangiri

building were constructed today it would be classified as a class 9c, and that any new building works to the existing building would trigger the requirement to demonstrate compliance with this classification. This advice will be considered as part of ongoing efforts to negotiate with the commonwealth and other key stakeholders on what the future of respite care arrangements in the ACT, including the future of Burrangiri, will look like.

The report also considered the state of the building in the context of its current use, and the summary of findings is as follows:

Based on our review, it has been identified that the existing building has significant shortfalls when compared to the current Building Code of Australia. Of concern is a lack of fire sprinklers to the existing building.

The report said that, as a minimum, it is recommended the building be upgraded to include: an automatic fire sprinkler system to comply with standards; an upgrade of the smoke detection and alarm system to comply with standards; ensuring all existing fire walls meet a minimum fire rating; upgrading internal walls to ensure no smoke compartment exceeds 500 square metres; a hydrant coverage assessment to be completed by a hydraulic engineer to ensure coverage to all areas of the building; ensuring all exits are free from obstructions; and upgrading all door hardware to ensure free handle egress.

The report concludes:

A comprehensive fire safety upgrade should be undertaken within six to 12 months to align with the findings of this report.

Predictably, this independent analysis, which Ms Carrick insisted on, has now confirmed the risks associated with the current state of the building in the context of its use as an aged care respite facility. The report was only very recently finalised, and I have not yet had a chance to talk to the Health and Community Services Directorate, as the landlord, about any implications for the facility's current use.

However, this report makes it clear that there will not be any option other than to close the facility for refurbishment or replacement at the end of the current contract in June 2027.

So, while the report did not show what Ms Carrick had clearly hoped it would, it has provided the level of clarity that I hope will inform a more sensible discussion as we work with the commonwealth government, Ms Carrick, Senator Pocock and the Save Burrangiri Action Group to deliver a longer term aged care residential respite outcome for our community. I will continue to update the Assembly with the 26 March motion.

**MS CARRICK** (Murrumbidgee) (3.01), by leave: I think that says it all: "There is no option but to close the facility for the refurb". There are always options. It is important that we ground this discussion on facts, particularly when it comes to building classifications and what they actually mean for Burrangiri. A class 3 building is designed for people who can generally evacuate independently. It covers accommodation like hostels, boarding houses, and importantly, respite settings where people are still mobile and living in the community. A class 9c building, on the other

hand, is a residential aged care facility; a nursing home, designed for people who cannot operate without assistance and who require continuous high-level clinical care.

And this is the fundamental issue: respite does not automatically mean residential aged care. The GSD report itself makes clear that a building housing older people, even those needing care, can still appropriately fall within a class 3 classification, depending on the service model. So, if Burrangiri is used for a medium-level respite care for people who can leave the building, it aligns with class 3. It does not need the major refurb. But instead, we see the assumption that it must meet 9c standards, driving a costly refurbishment and a narrative that the building is not fit for purpose.

Now, if the minister chooses to pursue that model, fine. But let us be clear about the outcome. We spend significant money and gain no additional beds. And that brings me to what I think is the real missed opportunity here. At a time when we have \$10 million in federal funding on the table, I am deeply disappointed that there has been no genuine analysis of options, to look at the full spectrum of respite need in our community.

Because respite is not a one-size-fits-all. We have low-needs respite which is often community or cottage-based; medium-needs respite for people who need supervision and support but remain mobile; high-needs respite for people requiring nursing care and clinical oversight; and, importantly, disability respite, which is alongside but distinct from aged care. Yet we have not seen a plan that maps what types of care are needed, in what volumes, and in which locations.

For example, there is a very clear alternative model for high-needs respite co-located in separate, dedicated wings or buildings within existing aged care sites. This delivers economies of scale in nursing care—and providers are interested, because it avoids the disruption of constantly moving respite clients through permanent resident areas. That is smart planning; that is a system design. If we did that, then Burrangiri could play a different and equally critical role, providing medium level respite care in a class 3 setting for people who can still leave the building and remain connected to their community.

We could have the right care in the right place, matched to the right level of need. But instead, what we have is a narrow focus on a single building, assessed against a single model without stepping back to ask, “What does the ACT actually need when it comes to respite care?”

And that is the disappointment, because it was not just a technical exercise, it was an opportunity. It was an opportunity to design a modern, flexible respite system that supports carers, supports older people, and uses public investment wisely. Instead, we risk spending millions to stand still. Thank you.

## **Papers**

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

Woden Town Centre integrated land use plan—Assembly resolution of 3 February 2026—Government response to (3)(f), dated June 2026.

Woden Town Centre working group—Establishment—Assembly resolution of 20 March 2025—Government response and Woden Town Centre integrated land use plan—Assembly resolution of 3 February 2026—Government response to (3)(b)(ii)—Woden Town Centre Working Group—June 2026 Quarterly Report.

## **Electoral (Gambling Industry) Amendment Bill 2026**

**Mr Emerson**, pursuant to notice, presented the bill, together with an explanatory statement.

Title read by Clerk.

**MR EMERSON** (Kurrajong) (3.06): I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

Communities suffer when politicians are captured by harmful industries. Democracies fail when people in positions of power, like those of us here in this Assembly, make decisions that put vested interests ahead of community interests. Elected representatives do the very thing that makes people hate politics when, out of self-interest, they prioritise the preferences of powerful industries over what is best for the everyday people they are supposed to represent. The ACT acknowledged this when it banned political donations from property developers. It is time to do the same for political donations from the gambling industry.

Australians are the biggest gambling losers in the world. Canberrans want to see real action on gambling reform. People see gambling harm increasing in our community every year, and they are asking why their governments are not doing more about it. It is a good question.

According to the ACT Gambling and Racing Commission's 2024 gambling survey, one in six Canberrans reported experiencing gambling harm, either from their own gambling, from someone else's gambling, or from legacy harm related to gambling that occurred in the past. The Gambling and Racing Commission's most recent annual report shows that known gambling harm incidents increased in the ACT by almost 50 per cent last year; from 32,095 incidents in 2023-24 to 47,337 incidents in 2024-25.

The most common kind of gambling harm incident is concerning money-seeking behaviour, which usually involves people making multiple cash withdrawals to continue gambling. This kind of incident was recorded 36,482 times last year. That is 100 times a day, here in our community. Yet only 1.28 per cent of incident reports made by gaming machine licence holders that related to gambling harm indicators led to patrons being offered self-exclusion or support service information—1.28 per cent.

In July 2025, the Australia Institute estimated that 84 per cent of Australians' pokies losses come from at-risk gambling, not from people gambling within responsible limits. We know this is a massive problem in the ACT.

A 2017 survey commissioned by the Canberra Gambling Reform Alliance found that more than 70 per cent of Canberrans believed poker machines cause more harm than

good. Most people who were surveyed supported reducing the number of pokies in the ACT. Over 80 per cent supported load-up limits on poker machines, and almost 80 per cent supported far lower bet limits.

We have reduced the number of pokies in the ACT to some 3,400 machines; down from over 5,000. But, despite the reduction in machines, both gaming revenue and gambling harm have continued to increase. Research out of the Australian National University projects that gaming revenue will not actually start decreasing in the ACT until we hit 2,000 poker machines—10 years from now, under the policy taken to the election by Labor. So basically, while it is a welcome initiative in principle, the government's current poker machine reduction policy is not ambitious enough to actually reduce harm at all, for at least another decade.

Why have we not done more to address gambling harm in our community? Well, we have thought about it. In 2022, the ACT government consulted on lowering the bet limit on pokies from \$10 to \$5 and introducing a \$100 load-up limit. In 2024, the ACT government consulted on limiting child and youth exposure to gambling advertising in the ACT, and found there was significant support for a total ban on gambling advertising.

I understand a regulation was previously drafted to introduce mandatory gaming room closures from 2 am to 10 am, seven days a week in clubs across the ACT. However, the minister has not issued that regulation, despite New South Wales and Victoria having introduced similar mandatory shutdowns to ensure a break in play during the early morning hours when the risk of gambling harm is significantly increased. The government has not imposed lower bet limits or introduced load-up limits. The government has not taken any steps to reduce gambling advertising in the ACT. Why not?

From 1994-95 to 2011-2012, ACT Labor received hundreds of thousands of dollars every single year from the Canberra Labor Club, which operates hundreds of poker machines, peaking at \$1.08 million in 2011-2012. In the early 2010s, Labor set up their property investment vehicle, the 1973 Foundation, funded by almost \$6.5 million from the Canberra Labor Club. ACT Labor then started receiving hundreds of thousands of dollars in annual funding from the 1973 Foundation instead of the Labor Club, peaking at \$1.95 million in 2023-24.

It is like they saw the writing on the wall when New South Wales imposed a ban on political donations from gambling industry corporations back in 2011. But such a ban was never introduced here in the ACT. The New South Wales ban was expanded in 2023 to capture not-for-profit clubs with poker machines. But again, that was not enough to nudge this Assembly to pass similar laws here in the ACT.

Since 2015, the major parties have disclosed on their annual returns over \$275,000 worth of donations from gambling industry entities, including cash and in-kind contributions. A large portion of these contributions involve free use of facilities, generally for branch meetings. So, party members are provided with meeting rooms free of charge within pokies venues, where they gather to discuss prospective policy positions like how best to regulate pokies venues. Great. I am not saying people in politics should not gather in these venues, just that they should not be given special

treatment when they do.

Cash donations are also part of the mix, and we know the gambling industry increases its donations to political parties when gambling reform is on the agenda. Last term, the ACT government was consulting on lowering bet limits for poker machines. The Canberra Liberals received cash donations from the gambling lobby, including Responsible Wagering Australia. And now, this term, with a gaming reform minister who has got a PhD in gambling harm research and is considering sweeping harm reduction measures, ClubsACT have started making cash donations to the Canberra Liberals again late last year, having not donated a disclosable amount to either of the major parties in the last five years.

Obviously, these donations are made with the aim of securing particular outcomes—outcomes that favour the gambling industry over the best interests of the people of the ACT, whom we are here to represent. The same kind of behaviour can be seen at the federal level.

A recent poll commissioned by the Australia Institute shows that 77 per cent of Australians support a total ban on gambling advertisements. In 2021, the Standing Committee on Justice and Community Safety’s inquiry into the operation of the 2020 ACT election and the Electoral Act recommended the ACT government explore options for banning donations from gambling entities and associated industry representative bodies. And, just last week, this Assembly’s Standing Committee on Social Policy released the report from our inquiry into men’s suicide rates, recommending a full gambling advertising ban because of the role that gambling harm plays in men’s distress and suicidality.

This echoes a recommendation from a landmark report entitled *You Win Some, You Lose More*, which was handed down in 2023 by a bipartisan federal parliamentary committee chaired by late Labor MP Peta Murphy. That report recommended a full gambling ad ban on the basis that “partial bans on gambling advertising do not work” because “harmful industries have shown they will identify and capitalise on any gaps in marketing restrictions”.

Yet, a full three years later, the federal Labor government recently announced a package of watered-down reforms that respond to just three of the 31 recommendations in the Murphy report. That package includes, you guessed it, a partial ban on gambling advertising; a partial ban that will not work. That reform was not announced because it is what Australians want—77 per cent of Australians support a total ban—nor what the evidence points to, what the 2023 committee report made clear, or what experts recommend, but because of immense pressure from the gambling industry—an industry which donates huge sums of money to the political party that is in power. That is what it looks like to be captured by the gambling lobby.

We cannot let this happen in the ACT. This bill and the penalties it imposes are modelled on the ACT’s existing prohibition of political donations from property developers. It applies to all political parties, members of the Legislative Assembly, candidates and associated entities. It bans donations from gambling industry entities including casinos, licensed bookmakers, racing organisations, venues with poker machines, manufacturers of gambling products or equipment, any entity that receives a

majority of its funding from the gambling industry and any other individual or entity whose business undertakings significantly involve wagering, betting or other gambling.

It also bans donations from close associates of any of the entities captured by the bill, drawing on the definition of what comprises a “close associate” from the existing property developer ban in the Electoral Act, combined with the definition of an “influential owner” in the Gaming Machine Act.

The bill also closes a loophole that has allowed parties to exclude in-kind donations of free facilities use or free venue hire from their weekly gift disclosures to the ACT Electoral Commission. Many of the provisions in the bill are minor technical amendments related to this change, which ensure the value of free or discounted use of meeting rooms is included in calculating the total amount of gifts provided to entities under the act. While annual returns from ACT Labor and the Canberra Liberals from the last decade show a large number of gifts from pokies venues in the form of free facilities use, these have not been disclosed in their regular gift returns because of this loophole.

The bill requires free facilities use to be disclosed like other donations and, as part of the ban on donations from the gambling industry, prohibits venues containing poker machines, for instance, from providing free or discounted access to facilities such as meeting rooms to political entities if the use of those facilities is not normally free. If this is a problem, political parties that are represented in this Assembly might choose to use the more than \$28,500 they receive in public funding per MLA each year to administer their parties, to pay for the use of these venues like everyone else does.

The bill contains sensible exemptions for venues that are not otherwise gambling industry entities but that host games of two-up on Anzac Day or that carry out exempt lotteries under the Lotteries Act and for things like charity raffles. The bill contains a commencement date of 1 July 2027, allowing time for everyone, including the Electoral Commission, to get their affairs in order.

But addressing gambling harm in our community is not a can that we can afford to continue kicking down the road. I note this was acknowledged in the final report from the independent inquiry into the future of the ACT clubs industry, which concluded recently. The report states clearly that harm reduction must begin immediately.

This bill should be uncontroversial. It should be supported by all members of this Assembly. The bill does not ban gambling. It does not prohibit gambling industry entities or associated persons from sharing their views, concerns and priorities with MLAs, political parties or candidates. What it does is simple. This legislation severs the financial ties between politics and the gambling industry; ties which have Canberrans rightly asking, “Why are we not tackling gambling harm in our community? And what are you, my elected representatives, gaining from that inaction?”

The Minister for Gaming Reform has promised significant gambling harm reduction measures in this term of government. Other members may also have measures they intend to introduce. When those measures come before this Assembly, they must be considered on their merits, in alignment with the long-term interests of our community and on the basis of the best available evidence—not on the basis of who is receiving

political donations from the gambling industry. Ensuring that occurs is the core purpose of this bill.

Multiple stakeholders provided valuable input into this legislation and like many people across our community, I am very keen to see it turned into law. I want to thank, in particular, the Australia Institute, the Canberra Gambling Reform Alliance, the Public Health Association of Australia and others for working with me and my office on getting this bill ready for presentation today. I commend my bill to the Assembly.

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

## **Sport and recreation—sports fields**

**MR MILLIGAN** (Yerrabi) (3.19): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) the ACT is facing a sportsground shortage and sportsground maintenance crisis;
- (b) there has been an increase in demand for sportsgrounds in Canberra due to:
  - (i) the ACT's growing population;
  - (ii) an increasing sport and recreation participation rate;
  - (iii) extended sporting competitions; and
  - (iv) light improvements on grounds allowing for more usable hours;
- (c) since 2017, the ACT's population has grown by 75,000 but the Government has only increased irrigated sportsgrounds by six hectares, the equivalent of two sporting fields;
- (d) the resulting increase in demand for existing sportsgrounds has placed greater stress on the turf which has impacted field quality; and
- (e) feedback received at the Canberra Liberals' sportsground roundtable on 4 June 2026 from over 70 individuals representing over 40 different sporting clubs, associations and advocacy groups showed that:
  - (i) increased usage of sportsgrounds is leading to a decline in field quality;
  - (ii) the decline in field quality is making sportsgrounds unsafe, with some clubs already reporting injured players and volunteers;
  - (iii) sportsground maintenance is not meeting the expectations of community members and clubs who pay their ground hire fees; and
  - (iv) the responsiveness of the government to these concerns has been limited by the poor resourcing of the sportsground management team;

(2) further notes that:

- (a) during the Millennium drought the ACT Government closed several irrigated sportsgrounds across the Territory to preserve water, transforming them into dryland ovals;

- (b) the 2023 *Urban Open Space Land Management Plan* outlined a strategic framework for the possible reactivation of 14 of the 32 identified ovals;
  - (c) Higgins 1 was the first dryland oval to be reactivated as an irrigated sportsground with a budget of \$2,600,000 in 2019-2020;
  - (d) Melba District Playing Fields has also been selected for a trial reactivation as one of the 14 identified ovals; and
  - (e) the Government has not committed to a public schedule for the reactivation of the remaining 13 category 1 ovals; and
- (3) calls on the Government to:
- (a) commit to an accelerated reactivation schedule for the dryland ovals in category 1, including:
    - (i) plans for consultation with sporting associations, clubs and the community for the proposed ovals; and
    - (ii) plans for the appropriation of necessary funds;
  - (b) table this schedule in the Assembly by 17 September 2026; and
  - (c) explore options, where appropriate, to allow for the booking of dryland ovals for training by clubs and junior leagues.

I am moving this motion as we, on this side of the chamber, have been listening to the sporting and recreational community. We all know the benefits that playing sport can give us. Being part of a team teaches our children important lessons about effort, teamwork and sportsmanship, as well as allowing them to make lifelong friends. Physical exercise can help us age gracefully and live longer and better lives. I know that all members are familiar with these positive outcomes and want to help facilitate participation by providing the spaces to play.

Unfortunately, this is not the reality for so many sporting clubs in Canberra. Last week, the Canberra Liberals held a sportsground roundtable to hear directly from the community about the state of Canberra's playing fields. The stories we heard were horrific: rat and mice infestations, hoons ripping up the fields, antisocial behaviour and vandalism, just to mention a few. The roundtable also focused on larger structural issues with sportsgrounds in Canberra, with a particular focus on safety and capacity.

I want to thank the minister for attending, and I know that the community was appreciative of the bipartisan spirit of the evening. I can say that the community do not really care about playing politics; they just want action on this matter.

The concern which has led me to this motion is all the focus around safety. Clubs and volunteers have shared with us that the maintenance level on existing sportsgrounds has made the fields unsafe to play on, in some cases. In the last few months Kambah 1, Kambah 204, Calwell 204, Kippax and Weston fields have all been deemed unsafe to play on and games have been cancelled.

It is clear that these fields are being overused and that is making them unsafe. The Assembly must move to resolve this issue as quickly as possible, to make sportsgrounds safer. We have heard stories of bruised knees, sprained ankles, parents rushing their kids to a GP, and people having to put pause on their life because of a sporting injury. Even a quick glance at most of the ACT's sportsgrounds can reveal unsafe surfaces,

divots and exposed sprinkler systems.

Another thing we have heard from sports clubs is that they are at capacity; that due to the lack of facilities, they are having to make difficult decisions about whether they can accept more participants. This is not something that the clubs should be worrying about.

Canberra's need to provide sport for the ACT is growing. This means more fields and different types of fields. Passing this motion is the first practical step going forward.

This crisis did not come out of nowhere. It occurred after years of government inaction. As I mentioned in the motion, the ACT's population has grown over by 70,000 people since 2017. That means more players and increased demand for facilities. But in the same time period, the amount of available irrigated sportsgrounds in the territory has increased by only two fields, roughly, according to annual reports.

All of this is why it is important that we make the most of what we currently have. The ACT government has identified 14 dryland ovals which can be transitioned into irrigated sportsgrounds. However, they have not provided the community with a plan or timeline of when this will occur. It has been six years since the last dryland oval was reactivated, and we have seen no further action; only hollow promises. That is why I am moving this motion today.

The call-ons in this motion recognise that the current approach to reactivating the category 1 dryland ovals is not good enough. Sporting clubs need more spaces to play. Existing sportsgrounds need the pressure eased on them now. That is why we are calling on the government to commit to an accelerated schedule for the reactivation of these fields.

This motion also recognises that these projects work best when the community has a stake in the outcome and when their feedback is able to shape development to suit their sporting needs.

We saw this benefit firsthand with the reactivation of Melba 1, and the positive impact that this has had on the local club. The Belconnen Sharks junior team can now be confident that they have the space to train, and parents can be confident that their kids will not be injured by an unsafe field. That is why the reactivation schedule must include plans for consulting with sporting clubs and associations and the community so we can deliver the best outcome.

Mr Assistant Speaker, this motion is also about delivering for the community in a financially responsible way. Reactivating dryland ovals will give ratepayers maximum bang for buck. However, we do acknowledge, on this side of the chamber, that delivering these fields will require an investment, and that is why the motion calls on the government to plan for the necessary spending through existing budget processes.

The clearest message from the roundtable was that the community cannot wait another two years for this crisis to be fixed. They want to know that the government has a plan to address these concerns. Clubs and associations which are planning for their next sporting season want the confidence to know that they have got the places available to use—and when they are available.

That is why the accelerated reactivation schedule should be tabled in the Assembly by 17 September, so that people can plan for the future and ensure transparency and accountability.

It is also important that the government explores measures in the short term to ease the current pressures on the sporting fields. One solution could be to allow clubs to start using some of the dryland ovals—where it is safe to do so, of course. This could provide some immediate relief.

Mr Assistant Speaker, it is my understanding that this motion will pass as-is, and I want to thank members for supporting this reasonable, practical and needed measure. This is a cost-effective approach to resolving the sportsgrounds crisis. We need to meet our obligations to the community, and the government needs to finally take action on the dryland ovals and bring them back online for sporting use.

**MS CARRICK** (Murrumbidgee) (3.27): I thank Mr Milligan for bringing this motion forward. I support this motion because it reflects what community sporting clubs are clearly telling us—that the sportsground network is under pressure and clubs are feeling it. This is not just about wanting more fields; it is about safety, participation, affordability, and whether volunteer-run clubs can continue to serve their communities.

As Canberra grows, demand is increasing. Longer seasons, higher participation, more evening use and improved lighting are all positive, but they also place greater strain on turf, facilities and maintenance. Reactivating suitable dryland ovals is a practical part of the solution. These are public assets and, where they can be safely and sustainably brought back into use, the government should have a clear, transparent plan—not a case-by-case approach with no public schedule.

We already know that the government has identified 14 ovals with potential for reactivation. Importantly, this includes several in Woden Valley and Weston Creek, such as Chifley, Farrer, Lyons and Torrens in the Woden Valley, and Waramanga and Weston in Weston Creek. These are established communities where clubs would welcome additional capacity and where pressure on existing facilities is already being felt.

The next step is transparency. Which sites will be prioritised? What works are required? What funding is needed and when will delivery occur? This motion reasonably calls for an accelerated schedule, consultation with clubs and communities, and a clear funding plan.

Not all dryland ovals will be suitable for formal sport. Many are valued, informal open spaces, and some should remain that way. That is why consultation is essential. The point that I have made before still stands: if physical activity should not be left to chance then the planning of the infrastructure that supports it should not be, either. We need to see the broader policy thinking behind how facilities are distributed across Canberra, including dryland ovals, indoor facilities, aquatic centres and the infrastructure that supports participation.

There are some great opportunities with Chifley and Weston, both being school ovals.

They were let go with the school closures. These are growing populations, and opening the schools and upgrading the ovals is a great opportunity.

I also support exploring appropriate use of some dryland ovals for training, particularly for juniors, where clubs need certainty and safe places to play. Community sport depends on more than fields; lighting, change rooms, toilets, seating, shade, safe paths, parking and accessibility all determine whether people can participate safely and comfortably.

A public reactivation schedule would give clubs certainty, help communities to understand what is planned, and allow the Assembly to assess whether investment is being distributed fairly. However, reactivating dryland ovals is only part of the solution. It does not replace the need for proper forward planning, particularly in fast-growing areas, like Molonglo. These communities need a sportsground system that is planned ahead of demand, not one that is constantly trying to catch up. Community sport supports health, youth engagement and social connection. If we value these outcomes, we must properly plan, fund and maintain the infrastructure that makes them possible.

Thank you for bringing this terrific motion forward, Mr Milligan.

**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) (3.31): I thank Mr Milligan for this motion, highlighting the future of dryland ovals and the need to plan for growing demand across our sports fields.

As outlined previously, the ACT government manages more than 100 sporting venues, covering 280 hectares, comprising 884 individual, hireable sportsgrounds. The demand for our sports facilities is strong and continues to grow. Our community expects—rightly so—high-quality playing surfaces, and there is a shared understanding that we must plan ahead to meet the demand.

The question before the Assembly is not whether action is required, but how to take that action in a practical, sustainable and equitable way across the territory. These facilities support more than 300 user groups each year. In this calendar year alone, more than 47,000 booked hours have been recorded, which is a nine per cent increase on the same period last year. Further to that, there is significant informal community use of sportsgrounds which is not captured in booking data, which adds further pressure on sportsground playing surfaces.

This broader context is important when considering calls for accelerated expansion. While population growth and increased participation are contributing factors, field condition is influenced by more than just one demand alone. Environmental conditions, ageing infrastructure and sustained high levels of use all play a role. This year, rainfall has been lower, compared to the previous five years, which has increased the reliance on irrigation systems that are often operating at their limits.

In response, the government is working to deliver a structured and sustainable approach to managing our sportsgrounds to meet community needs. This includes planned maintenance programs, seasonal shutdowns, targeted remediation works, and careful allocation of sports field use to support long-term sustainability, in collaboration with

sporting clubs.

This motion calls on the government to commit to an accelerated reactivation schedule for dryland ovals. I acknowledge that its intent is to make better use of this available land into the future. However, their reactivation is not simple, and it is not a low-cost exercise. It involves irrigation upgrades or replacements, understanding drainage conditions, environmental planning and necessary, ongoing maintenance arrangements, along with the construction of amenities like toilets and change rooms.

I point out to the Assembly that Mr Milligan's motion references that the government has only increased irrigated sportsgrounds by six hectares, which equates to two sportsgrounds. In fact, the government has increased sportsgrounds by 12.2 hectares, which is more than double what Mr Milligan has suggested. That is the equivalent of six sporting fields, which includes, Higgins, Holt, Taylor, Ngunnawal and Stirling and, most recently, the partial reactivation of Melba 3. That does not include the reactivation in recent years of ovals attached to public schools, which includes Canberra high, and more recently the Fraser Primary School oval, where work has commenced to irrigate and upgrade the facility.

The government will continue to progress the framework which was established in the Urban Open Space Land Management Plan, which identifies priority locations for potential reactivation that members have discussed. The ACT government has been working on restoring even more dryland ovals. I am happy to let the Assembly know that, as part of this work, five locations have been identified as a priority for community consultation. These include Lyneham Oval, Weston Oval, Spence Oval, Narrabundah Oval and Torrens Oval. These ovals have been identified based on geographical demand, as well as existing infrastructure, like parking and toilets, and the size of the oval.

Of course, engagement with sporting associations, clubs and the broader community is also essential in understanding demand and patterns of use, as well as long-term expectations for these facilities. The government will continue to work closely with sports clubs, as well as other users, to inform any planning and decision-making.

Finally, on the question of allowing dryland ovals to be booked for training, the government is happy to explore options to make dryland ovals available on the sportsground booking system where appropriate and where it is safe to do so. The government is also taking action to improve access to sportsgrounds through targeted maintenance, infrastructure improvements and strategic planning for future supply.

I continue to engage with users and the community during our plan. After all, we all love our community sportsgrounds. We all want the same thing, and working together in true partnership is the way that we will achieve the best outcomes for everyone. Rather than committing to accelerated timelines that might not be deliverable, I can commit to a measured, evidence-based approach to ensure that any expansion of our sportsgrounds is well planned, sustainable over the long term and has full consultation with sportsground users and other groups.

The government will support Mr Milligan's motion today, and I look forward to reporting back to the Assembly on plans for consultation with sports clubs and the

community.

**MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi) (3.36):** I thank Mr Milligan for moving this motion today. Over the years, we have both been representing the Yerrabi community in this place, and have seen firsthand the neglect and some of the mismanagement of local sports infrastructure across Yerrabi.

More importantly, we have seen the impact that it has on the local community when an oval or a field is not properly irrigated; when it runs dry, the grass dies. It is not just an eyesore; it is a place where our kids and local sporting teams cannot play anymore. It becomes unsafe and it puts players and others at risk of serious injury. When our fields and ovals close and fall into disuse, that takes something from us. It reduces our quality of life.

I fully support the work that Mr Milligan is doing in trying to shed light on the government's decisions and trying to work constructively and practically to improve the situation. After all, the motion is not asking for much. It is just asking the government to develop a plan for returning irrigation services to more of our dryland ovals so that they can be fully utilised by our local clubs and our local community.

I am hopeful that the government will agree to this. We have just heard from the minister that they will agree, which is great news. I was driving through Fraser the other day and noted the Fraser Oval, so it is good to see it starting to happen. It will improve the quality of life of people around Canberra and help them to flourish. That is exactly what we should all be working to achieve.

**MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (3.38):** I rise to speak today in support of the motion brought forward by Mr Milligan. This is the first of two motions that both address important issues that go to the heart of what many people like about living in Canberra, which is our urban green spaces. Most residents can walk their dog at a local park, play football at a nearby oval or use a playground. Even footpaths and nature strips play an important part in this city's urban space experiences.

Mr Milligan's motion is like a motion that Ms Clay brought to the Assembly back in November 2021, I believe. Many ovals were converted from irrigation to dryland ovals because of the millennium drought. Ms Clay wanted to see land management plans developed for these ovals. These were included in the Urban Open Space Land Management Plan, which was finalised in 2024.

It is also important to consult with the community throughout this process to ensure that locals have a say in how these important community resources are given priority. The community knows best when it comes to what its local neighbourhood needs. A good process to gather ideas and facilitate group discussion is the best way to get a good outcome. A government that listens to and trusts the community voices, and has the desire to support this change, will deliver great urban spaces.

Mr Milligan talked about the many voices he has heard from about how the demand for existing ovals is such that they are being impacted by overuse. One option would be to reactivate dryland ovals. We know how expensive it is to reactivate these ovals. Through this motion, we need to start thinking about setting a schedule for the

reactivation of ovals. That makes sense. It allows for input from sporting groups, and it must also involve the local community.

The reactivation of dryland ovals is a promising pathway. The Higgins one and Melba District Playing Fields are early examples. But without a clear schedule for the remaining 13 category 1 ovals—as Mr Carrick pointed out, many of which tend to be south side—clubs cannot plan, grow or meet demand.

This debate is not simply about turf irrigation or field layouts, although those things are really cool, and really fun to hear about in estimates. It is about the fundamental role that green space plays in the life of a community.

**MR WERNER-GIBBINGS** (Brindabella) (3.40): I thank Mr Milligan for the motion and for raising, and I thank the minister for laying out how the government means to approach, communities' use of the play space resources that are available to people in the ACT. I do note that none of the ovals that are candidates for reactivation that we are talking about are south of Hindmarsh Drive, which is fine. I give a little shout-out to Waramanga Oval. I am glad that is on the list. That is where I played my first-ever game of Aussie Rules for the Weston Creek Wildcats—zero possessions, one given away penalty. I think that was in 1994.

**Mr Parton:** But a lot of voice, I reckon; a lot of chatter.

**MR WERNER-GIBBINGS:** No, I was not very good. Also, Weston Oval, at Weston Primary School, is where I captained the mighty year 6 team to beat the year 5 team in 1993. Those were ovals that were used a lot by the community.

The problem is that the cost of reactivating those ovals and the other 11 that would be on this list, from the calculations that I have done, is significant. Ms Castley mentioned that it is not a lot to ask. The motion is quite specific. It asks about plans for the appropriation of necessary funds.

When I saw this, I thought that maybe this motion is actually a portent of what we might be hearing tomorrow, in the reply to the budget—a lay-down, a marker, about money that will be spent, if there is to be an alternative government, on the reactivation of ovals. It would cost \$41.86 million to reactivate those ovals, which is a 25.5 per cent increase on the amount spent in this year's budget on economic development, tourism, sports and infrastructure.

That is a big uplift. That is a big spend on reactivating these ovals. It is not something that I would expect the government would be able to do in the next three months. However, with the minister laying out how she means to approach it, it is a much clearer and more sensible way of engaging with the community and seeing what is possible.

**MR PARTON** (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (3.43): I do not know how Mr Werner-Gibbings has seen my budget in-reply speech, to be honest. I wish there was footage of that first game of Mr Werner-Gibbings for the Weston Creek Wildcats, because I think it would be something to see. You were probably about as rubbish as me, as a footballer!

I rise to support the motion from Mr Milligan and to support the work that he has done in this space over a long period of time. I also want to commend the Canberra sporting community, who turned up in great numbers at our sports roundtable in Woden, at an event that hosts gambling, but that is a whole other story. It was the clubs doing what they do as clubs. It was a wonderful event, as I know you know, Mr Assistant Speaker, because you were in attendance, as were you, Ms Carrick, and you, Ms Berry.

Mr Werner-Gibbins made a really good point, that the provision of suitable sporting facilities, to allow community sport to be played in this city of ours at the level that would be expected, is a major problem because of decisions that have been made by this government over 25 years, when the population has dramatically increased in that time. This was not a priority for this government when it comes to spending.

Additionally, we have certainly seen highlighted at the roundtable and in other areas that the ongoing, long-term maintenance of the existing facilities, particularly given their escalated use, because there is a shortage of them, is causing massive problems. If we were not going down the path of moving more quickly to get more of these dryland ovals back online, whether they be for actual organised sport or just for training, we would be kidding ourselves.

It is no surprise to me that this motion will get, I believe, support from just about everybody in the chamber. I commend the work done by Mr Milligan, and I was most pleased to hear the response from Minister Berry.

**MR EMERSON** (Kurrajong) (3.45): I would like to speak briefly in support of Mr Milligan's motion, and I thank him for bringing it forward today. I think everyone in this Assembly—and this is clear from the debate—understands why he has done so. Canberrans are some of the most active people in the country. According to the most recent Living Well in the ACT Region survey, 83.5 per cent of adults were considered sufficiently active in the inner north of Canberra, and 74.9 per cent of adults were sufficiently active in the inner south.

Those statistics are something to be proud of, but not something that we should take for granted. As our city grows and densifies, it is increasingly important that our community has access to high-quality green spaces and recreational facilities.

The revitalisation of dryland ovals is one way that we can secure this access, to ensure that the ACT is equipped to manage a growing population and deliver a high quality of life for people who live here and will live here. That, of course, includes adequate, well-serviced community spaces.

Multiple members, myself included, have been asking questions about bringing dryland ovals back online, as part of the solution to this problem. There are also solutions that do not rely exclusively on government initiatives and government funding. I have heard from community organisations that are willing and ready to play an active role as partners in reactivating dryland ovals. I would encourage the government to continue considering and pursuing these options. I hope to see a more meaningful partnership with our community sporting organisations in this area and in others moving forward.

Again, I thank Mr Milligan for bringing this motion to the Assembly and, on the back

of its passage, hopefully, we will see the reactivation of more of these critical community spaces.

**MR MILLIGAN** (Yerrabi) (3.47), in reply: I want to thank everyone who has contributed to the debate on this motion today. It is great to see so much support for this motion going forward. I think the benefit for the sporting community of bringing some of these dryland ovals back online is also important.

I want to address some of the comments from Mr Werner-Gibbings. He gave some costs in relation to bringing every one of those dryland ovals back online. That assumes every one of those dryland ovals requires exactly the same remedial work and is in exactly the same condition as previous ovals that have already been remediated. I think it is very wrong to assume that that is what it would cost to bring the others online; hence, that is why we have asked the government to work with the community, to work with sporting clubs and associations, to work out what ovals are suitable and what ovals should be brought back online. Obviously, as part of that assessment, the government would consider whether, having regard to the costs associated with bringing those ovals back online, it would be beneficial for the community.

Mr Assistant Speaker, could you imagine the cost of building a whole new oval from scratch? At least you already have the land there; the public infrastructure is already there, as part of the existing oval. Doing the remedial work and upgrading those ovals to bring them to a suitable condition for use in the sporting community would cost far less than what it would cost to build an oval from scratch. I could pretty much guarantee that.

We on this side of the chamber have been listening to the community. We held our roundtable; the minister attended, and Ms Carrick also attended. It was good to see her there. I knew that she would be coming there to advocate for her own electorate, and she certainly spoke on that today, it was good to see that support as well.

We have brought this motion forward because we have listened to the community. This is something that the community definitely needs. This will also contribute to and support the independent audit that we have called on the government to commence this year. This will certainly support that audit.

Overall, the work that we on this side of the chamber have done for sport and recreation, for the ACT community, is great. I think it will be beneficial for the whole community. I commend this motion to the Assembly.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **Molonglo Valley—playing fields**

**MS CARRICK** (Murrumbidgee) (3.50): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

(a) the Molonglo Valley is one of the ACT's fastest growing regions and is

- projected to reach 79,000 residents by 2065;
- (b) the 2016 Stromlo Forest Park Master Plan proposed four basic sports units and an enclosed oval. Each unit is an oval overlaid with two rectangular fields;
  - (c) Stage 1 of the current Development Application for the Stromlo District Playing Fields delivers one modified synthetic sports unit. Stage 2 would add a grass oval and a grass rectangular field, however this is yet to be funded;
  - (d) District Playing Fields are defined in Cabinet decision 11/090/CAB of 20 August 2012 as “District Playing Fields provide training and competition venues for organised sport at all levels and can be collocated with school facilities. Generally 15 hectares (subject to site specific conditions, a minimum of 10 hectares) to support the provision of six basic sport units. Amenities will typically include public car parking, training lights and one pavilion depending on the size of the complex”; and
  - (e) the reduced field capacity of the Stromlo District Playing Fields no longer meets this definition;
- (2) further notes that:
- (a) there is currently no evidence of planning for centrally-located high-capacity District Playing Fields in the Molonglo Valley. Existing sportsground provision is insufficient to meet current needs, let alone future demand across all sporting codes;
  - (b) high-capacity fields have economies of scale, so can be more cost-effective and better support volunteer-run sporting organisations;
  - (c) without sufficient playing fields, Molonglo residents are forced to join clubs in other districts, particularly in Weston Creek, increasing travel times and difficulty getting to training;
  - (d) different clubs and codes are forced to share facilities, restricting training access, increasing scheduling conflicts during peak periods and placing additional strain on volunteers and club administrators;
  - (e) should Molonglo Valley continue to develop without adequate and accessible sporting infrastructure, this could have far reaching consequences, including:
    - (i) reduced opportunities for physical activity and mental wellbeing;
    - (ii) limited development pathways for juniors, seniors and volunteers;
    - (iii) barriers to club growth and long-term sustainability; and
    - (iv) weakened neighbourhood identity and community connection; and
  - (f) community sporting clubs play a critical role in preventative health, youth engagement and social inclusion; and
- (3) calls on the Government to:
- (a) undertake an analysis of the number of playing fields needed for a population of 79,000 people in the Molonglo Valley;
  - (b) consult the community and identify a range of sites for large district playing fields in the Molonglo Valley;
  - (c) consult the community and develop social and economic criteria to

assess the site options in the Molonglo Valley;

- (d) determine the preferred sites for large District Playing Fields within the Molonglo Valley, in addition to the already planned Stromlo District Playing Fields Stage 1; and
- (e) report back to the Assembly by the last sitting day in September 2026.

The Molonglo Valley is one of the fastest growing regions in our city. By 2065, it is projected to be home to around 79,000 people. But right now, the infrastructure that builds community, particularly our sporting infrastructure, is simply not keeping pace.

Members may recall that the 2016 Stromlo Forest Park Master Plan envisaged a significant sporting precinct, including four basic sports units and an enclosed oval; that is, four AFL-cricket ovals overlaid with eight rectangle grounds, and an enclosed oval. That level of provision reflects what a growing district needs—fields for training, competition and community use across multiple codes. But that is not what is being delivered.

Under the current development application, stage 1 provides just one modified synthetic sports unit. A stage 2 has been flagged, which would add a grass oval and a single rectangular field, but this stage is not yet funded. What we are seeing is a steady scaling back of ambition at the exact time that demand is rapidly increasing. This matters because the government itself has defined what a district-level playing field facility should be. Under cabinet decision 11/090, district playing fields are intended to support organised sport at all levels, typically covering around 15 hectares, with capacity for multiple sports units, appropriate amenities and the ability to host both training and competition.

By that definition, what is currently planned at Stromlo no longer meets the standard of a true district facility, and the consequences are already being felt. There is no clear evidence of planning for centrally located, high-capacity district playing fields anywhere in Molonglo. As a result, residents are being pushed out of their own district to participate in sport. Families are travelling to Weston Creek and beyond, just to attend training. That means longer travel times, more logistical challenges and, ultimately, barriers to participation, particularly for young people.

Just as important as the number of fields is where they are located. Playing fields should not be hidden away on the edge of a suburb or tucked out of sight. When they are accessible by public transport, centrally located and visible, they bring life to a community. People walking past see games in action, hear the energy of training and feel that sense of connection. They become places where communities gather, where children aspire to play and where neighbours feel part of something bigger. Well-located playing fields help to create belonging; they should be part of the everyday fabric of a community, not an afterthought.

That is also why the Molonglo town centre planning matters. The draft master plan already points to an education, recreation and community heart, co-located with the main street. That should not remain an aspiration to be further investigated later. Molonglo still has no proper indoor sports facility, no tennis courts, no skate park, no library, and limited community and youth recreation infrastructure. The government has the opportunity now to plan a proper recreation precinct, close to schools, shops,

public transport and community facilities, so that sport and recreation are part of the life of the town centre, rather than being pushed to the edge, up a hill or somewhere people can only reach by car.

Clubs are also feeling the strain. Different sports and different teams are being forced to share limited space. Training windows are compressed, schedules are in conflict and volunteers, who are the backbone of community sport, are stretched further and further. If we allow this trajectory to continue, the impacts will go far beyond inconvenience. We will see fewer opportunities for physical activity and reduced mental wellbeing. We will see weaker pathways for player development, from juniors through to seniors.

Clubs will struggle to grow and, in some cases, to survive. Perhaps most importantly, we risk undermining the sense of community identity that local sport helps to build. Community sporting clubs are not just about sport. They are critical to preventive health, youth engagement and social inclusion. They are where friendships are formed, where communities come together and where people feel they belong.

My motion today calls on the government to undertake proper analysis of what a population of 79,000 people will actually need in terms of playing fields. It calls for genuine community consultation to identify suitable sites for large district facilities. It calls for the development of clear social and economic criteria to guide those decisions. Importantly, it calls for the government to determine preferred sites, in addition to the playing fields already planned at Stromlo Forest Park, and to report back to this Assembly by September 2026.

This is not an unreasonable ask. It is a practical, evidence-based approach to planning for a growing community. We have an opportunity now to ensure that Molonglo develops as a complete community, one that supports active lifestyles, strong clubs and connected neighbourhoods. But that will not happen by accident. It requires deliberate planning and a willingness to invest in the infrastructure that communities rely on. 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) (3.56): I want to thank Ms Carrick for this motion. I spoke this morning in the Assembly about the budget's record investment in housing. While housing is the essential foundation for a good life, housing alone does not create a community. That is why the government also invests in things like community sport and recreation facilities.

Of course, Canberrans love sport. We love watching it and we love playing it. We just love it. We have the highest rates of participation in the country, and I plan on keeping it that way. I know those participation rates are something that everybody in this chamber is proud of.

Ms Carrick is right; the Molonglo Valley is growing. As we build new suburbs, the government is focused on building homes, of course, but we are also focused on building the shops, schools, community spaces and sports facilities that new communities need to thrive.

As the Molonglo Valley's population grows over the next 40 years, the government has planned for and will keep delivering sports facilities. The topography of Molonglo Valley presents a unique challenge when it comes to building sporting fields, so we need to be realistic about what is possible and what is not, because there is not a lot of flat land there. But that does not mean Molonglo Valley communities will miss out.

Of course, as the motion acknowledges, the government has already invested \$35 million in the Stromlo District Playing Fields. These playing fields will be delivered in two stages. The first stage will deliver a synthetic turf sportsground which can be configured as either a single AFL oval or two rectangle fields. We will also build a pavilion, match-play lighting and parking. In the second phase, I look forward to seeing the facility expand to include natural turf ovals as well.

Stromlo District Playing Fields will not be the only sportsgrounds to service the Molonglo Valley as it grows over the next 40 years. Just last month, my colleague Minister Steel and I released the Molonglo Town Centre Master Plan. That master plan starts the conversation with the community about how the area will develop in the coming years and decades.

The master plan sets out a high vision for the community facilities in the town centre, as well as its surrounds. It includes a town oval to be developed as part of the proposed education precinct in the town centre. And we are not stopping there. Further work is underway to see how more sporting fields could be provided for in the region, including through planning studies that are being undertaken by the City and Environment Directorate.

Work that has already been done includes the planning and design frameworks which were completed in 2012 and 2019, and the 2023 district strategy highlights the challenge that we have with the topography of the region. There is a real lack of large, relatively flat parcels of land, typically up to 15 hectares, that would be suitable for high-capacity district facilities. Preliminary investigations indicate that some of the most suitable locations might be in areas that are immediately surrounding the Molonglo Valley. As this work continues, the government will carefully consider the needs of the growing community and will look forward to hearing from Molonglo residents and sports clubs as consultations are conducted in the coming years.

The government is supporting Ms Carrick's motion today, as we have much of the work that her motion calls for underway. But I do need to be clear with the Assembly that I will not be able to provide an exact identification of where sportsground facilities will go by September. It is just too soon for us to have that work completed. There is much to be determined through the subdivision design application stages of the Molonglo Valley town centre, as well as surrounds, over the coming years.

I look forward to providing further updates to the Assembly as this work progresses, particularly in relation to the Molonglo town centre and the ongoing assessment of potential future sites.

**MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (4.00):** I rise to speak in south-side solidarity to Ms Carrick's motion on district playing fields—

**Mr Barr:** That is a thing, is it, now?

**MISS NUTTALL:** It is now—which, at its heart, highlights the need to make best use of our urban spaces. Molonglo Valley is a growing suburban area that is influenced by its topography and its environmental values—some quite beautiful ones. These impact where you put your sporting fields, which are generally flat and occupy large areas of land. The development of Molonglo Valley has been underway for some time and, in its early planning, sites would have been identified for playing fields, such as the Stromlo District Playing Fields. I understand there is a development application for the overall development of the Stromlo District Playing Fields. That has been submitted, and it is under assessment by the Territory Planning Authority.

We have a long history of expressing our fair share of concerns about the environmental impact of the synthetic oval at those playing fields, but this has been canvassed broadly in other settings, and I do not wish to make other members sit here with me and watch the grass grow together in real time.

The Molonglo Town Centre Master Plan also identifies that an oval may be provided in the town centre, but there is more work that needs to be done before a site can be settled on. Without adequate playing fields, this means families from Molonglo need to travel to other districts, which means, often, spending more time in the car—or preferably a bus or a bike—to get to training. Having a local playing field encourages a local identity and local clubs, and it makes sure there is space for everyone. Clubs act as feeders to larger clubs, and better sporting opportunities, too.

Accessible, high-quality sporting fields and urban green spaces have a number of positive impacts. They include supporting our physical health and reducing chronic disease, improving mental wellbeing by providing stress relief and social connection, strengthening community identity by giving families and neighbours a place to gather, providing safe spaces for young people, fostering resilience, teamwork and belonging, enabling volunteer-run clubs to thrive, and offsetting the heat island effect that is only going to get worse with climate change. If anyone wants any more info on the topic, I think it was in 2019 that *Heat, humanity, and the hockey stick* came out—a really good publication on government response to climate change in sports settings.

Green space is essential infrastructure and Canberra prides itself on being one of the most active cities in Australia. The motion that is before us highlights real challenges, but it also represents a clear road map for solutions. By investing in green space, by planning proactively and by listening to our sporting and local communities, we can ensure that every resident—from Molonglo to Belconnen and Tuggeranong—has access to the fields, facilities and opportunities that they deserve. This is an investment in health, it is an investment in community, and it is an investment in the future of Canberra. I commend the motion to the Assembly.

**MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (4.03):** I rise in the first instance to confirm that, yes, the Canberra Liberals are absolutely supporting Ms Carrick's motion today. I thank her for moving it. I have spent a fair bit of time in and around the Molonglo Valley. I have said it before: I was at some of the earliest planning sessions. I think it was in about 2010 that I went to the sessions in the church just across from Coleman Court.

All the way back then, the plans that I remember seeing featured sporting facilities. There were ovals on those plans. With the potential residents at that time—because I was there, with my wife, looking at this maybe being the place we would be able to move into—everyone was quite excited about the potential of a new region for the ACT, a new region that would deliver the promise of a thriving centre. There were concerns, absolutely, about roads and traffic. Clearly, those concerns went unheard, to a large extent.

There was a great deal of optimism around what the Molonglo Valley could be, and sporting fields were absolutely a part of that. They continued to be a part of that right through the early planning phase. As we look through the history of Molonglo Valley, it seems to me that what has happened is that the government have said, “Yes, we could put a number of sporting fields in this location and that location.” They seemed to identify a bunch of potential locations. Over time, we have seen what we have seen with all sorts of other things in the Molonglo Valley. The scope of what we thought were promises, what we thought was going to happen, has been whittled down. The delivery is never going to match up to the thing that everyone thought they were promised.

Sporting fields were supposed to be part of everyday life throughout Molonglo Valley, but that is not the reality, if you are in Molonglo now. The reality that people in Molonglo are faced with—and I think it is important that someone should recognise exactly what the attitude is in Molonglo Valley—is that the government has increasingly walked away from all sorts of promises—social infrastructure promises, hard infrastructure promises. Promises like the east-west connector should have been well and truly underway by now. The Molonglo bridge on John Gorton Drive is way past due. Promises have been delayed and deferred, and people in Molonglo are missing out. And they have a right to be sceptical.

I am glad that the minister mentioned the so-called Molonglo town centre. I worked closely with the campaign to get a Molonglo town centre, to get some sort of town centre in Canberra’s fastest-growing region. Molonglo Valley is on track to have 70,000 to 80,000 people. Molonglo Valley deserves a genuine town centre, something more than a shopping centre plus apartments and an oval on the side. It should be somewhere that people come together for all sorts of reasons—social reasons and economic reasons. It should be the sort of place that embodies what Canberra can and should be. Recreation, sport, social infrastructure, commercial infrastructure: that is what a town centre ought to be.

If you listen to the Molonglo Valley Community Forum, for example, they will tell you that what the government has planned for the town centre is not what anyone has been asking for. People in Molonglo Valley are feeling absolutely like the government has walked away from them. When you walk up to a door and knock on it, and you have someone come to the door and you start a conversation, over a long period of time, the sort of thing I have been hearing is, “This isn’t what we were sold. We didn’t think that we were going to be just another dormitory. We didn’t think that we were going to be living with the crime problems that we have here. But the approach that the government has taken has left us behind.”

Mr Assistant Speaker, you see it in things like the so-called Molonglo joint emergency

services station. If you talk to someone in Molonglo Valley, they will point out that the Molonglo Valley emergency services station is, in fact, located in Weston Creek. Of course, it raises some more concerns with what the minister was just saying, when she said, “Maybe some of this infrastructure is going to be placed in areas around the Molonglo Valley.” Not in Molonglo Valley; maybe it will be somewhere around it.

I appreciate that there are challenges. I appreciate that it takes some planning to get to the heart of exactly how you are going to deliver these things. If only they had been working since about 2010, if only they had had time since 2010 to come up with some solutions to this. Given that, in fact, it has potentially been even longer than that, perhaps the minister can provide some information on exactly when we will find out; when the minister will let us know where the district playing fields will be, and maybe why she did not do anything.

People in the Molonglo Valley genuinely feel that they have been neglected and walked away from. They were sold a promise that the government has not delivered, and every one of them seems to be delayed, deferred or hollowed out—emergency services, community services and police.

The government went to an election not that long ago, promising to deliver a police station for Molonglo Valley. They had finally got on board with the Canberra Liberals; they were finally going to deliver a police station. Almost straight after the election, the newly minted minister in charge of policing walked that promise back entirely, coming out and saying, “At some point in the future, we think we’ll get some planning work underway.”

I am afraid that is exactly the attitude that people across the Molonglo Valley and, indeed, across a lot of the south feel is being applied by this government, when it comes to the places that we live. Sport, recreation, community infrastructure, essential services: these are the things that we depend on in our communities. It is about time that the government stepped up their game.

**MR EMERSON** (Kurrajong) (4.11): Very briefly, I want to thank Ms Carrick for bringing this motion forward and for her relentless advocacy for her electorate. I defer to her on these matters, generally speaking, and that is the case here. These are clearly very appropriate calls. I am very glad that we have Ms Carrick here in the Assembly to make these calls, to bring these matters from her electorate to the attention of the Assembly and, via the Assembly, to the attention of the government, in pursuit of having them actioned. For those reasons, I will be supporting this motion today.

**MS CARRICK** (Murrumbidgee) (4.12), in reply: I think it is concerning that the minister is looking at spaces around Molonglo. It is really concerning that the government does not understand town planning and the balance of dwellings, homes, commercial areas, jobs, services, health, education, public transport, community facilities, and public spaces. They are all part of town planning; they all need to be considered, when we look at it. It is not just a case of saying, “Here’s a bit of green land, a bit of space; we can plunk it in there.” It is like what occurred with the proposed ice rink behind the Tuggeranong town centre. Molonglo does not even have tennis courts or a skate park.

It seems to me that when we do our planning, if houses can be built then we cannot have community facilities. That is what seems to be happening in Woden. If there is a bit of land on which you can put a tower, god forbid that you would waste your time and not get the money from the tower. It seems to be the same in Molonglo. If you can put housing there, why would you put a community facility there? You do not get any money out of a community facility. In fact, it costs you money, if you are the government. Too bad about all the people that are paying rates for community facilities. Bad luck!

It is really disappointing. I hope that we can find centrally located places. We can do some good town planning that brings in these facilities so that they are a part of our life, not shoved to the outskirts. I would like to thank everybody for supporting my motion. I thank Miss Nuttall and Ms Tough. South-side solidarity has been mentioned. Mr Cocks is in there, too. This is not the last that you will hear from us. We will keep it up. We want to participate in our communities.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## Papers

### Motion to take note of papers

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

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

## Infrastructure—update Ministerial statement

**MR BARR** (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism and Trade) (4.15): I rise this afternoon to update the Assembly on the government's Infrastructure Investment Program and to outline how we are proposing to support Canberra's journey into a larger, more connected and more productive city.

This is not simply a program of projects. It is a program about how the city works, how it grows and how we manage that growth carefully and responsibly, because Canberra's story is changing. For much of its history in the 20th century, Canberra could be best defined as a large country town. Over recent decades, it has become a small city. Today, we are firmly a medium-sized city. That shift brings opportunity. The task before us now is to ensure that our infrastructure keeps pace with that change in a way that supports productivity, enables housing and maintains the quality of life that defines Canberra.

As a medium-sized city, Canberra now operates differently. We are managing systems at greater scale. We are connecting multiple employment centres. We are supporting a much larger and a considerably more diverse population. That means infrastructure decisions have wider impacts. They shape how people move across the city. They influence where homes are built. They affect how businesses operate and invest. This

is why infrastructure planning needs to be disciplined, long-term and grounded in real delivery, and this is the approach the government has taken.

The 2019 Infrastructure Plan established the framework that was needed. It set out a more structured approach to prioritisation and sequencing. It integrated infrastructure planning with population growth and reinforced the importance of maintaining fiscal discipline. Since then, the Built for CBR refresh in 2024 has sharpened the focus further. It has moved us towards a clearer outcomes framework, where investments are assessed not only on what is built but on what they enable. That includes better health services, stronger housing supply, improved connectivity and increased resilience. Over time, this has led to a more mature system of planning, delivering and refining continuously and seeking to build on experience in managing a pipeline at scale. We are applying that experience across the program.

Infrastructure is central to economic productivity. It affects how efficiently people move between home and work. It affects access to education and services. It shapes the cost and feasibility of doing business. In a growing city, those factors become more important each year. Small inefficiencies can begin to add up. That is why this program focuses not only on expanding infrastructure but on improving how the system performs as a whole. It is about ensuring that transport networks operate efficiently, health services have sufficient capacity, housing can be delivered at scale and infrastructure supports economic activity across the city.

It is also important to recognise the broader environment in which we are delivering this program. The ACT operates within a national infrastructure market. The same workforce, the same suppliers and the same construction capacity are in demand across all jurisdictions. At present, that demand is strong. Major infrastructure programs are underway in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane—including, obviously, significant investment in the lead-up to the Brisbane hosting the Olympics in 2032. That shapes the market. It influences costs, workforce availability and delivery timelines.

In that context, our approach has been to provide clarity and consistency. We have focused on maintaining a pipeline that is visible to industry. We have sequenced projects carefully, and we have continued to engage with the broader infrastructure market as the program evolves. This allows us to deliver effectively, even in that very competitive environment.

A central element of the Infrastructure Investment Program is stability. We have taken a considered approach to sequencing, with a focus on completing major projects that are already underway while progressing the next phase of works. This ensures that projects move through the pipeline in an orderly way, and it allows resources to be used efficiently. It reduces delivery risk and supports continuity in the local construction sector. A steady pipeline underpinning consistent delivery is not simply a technical consideration; it is fundamental to maintaining capability and confidence in the market, and it ensures that the program can be sustained over the long term.

The scale of this program is supported by a strong partnership with the commonwealth government. That partnership is delivering substantial co-investment across key sectors. Through the new national health funding arrangements, more than \$4 billion is being provided to the territory through to 2030-31 to contribute to the running of our

larger health system, with new and expanded hospitals and health facilities. In transport, commonwealth contributions of more than \$300 million are supporting light rail, including identified funding of approximately \$339 million for stage 2A and stage 2B.

A similar amount is supporting road infrastructure upgrades that support more housing in the territory. Around \$50 million is also contributing to other enabling infrastructure for housing, and more than \$200 million in housing finance programs are supporting delivery and construction across the territory. Importantly, I want to highlight the role the Housing Australia Future Fund is playing in contributing to the expansion of community and public housing. These partnerships allow us to extend the reach of our own investments and deliver more for the community.

The private sector is also playing a critical role in Canberra's growth. As the city evolves, we expect new development in the city, in town centres and in group centres to contribute to the quality of the public realm. This includes improvements to streets, landscaping and public spaces. It includes better integration with transport networks and community uses. It includes active frontages that contribute to the vitality of centres. This is about ensuring that the private sector investment contributes to broader city outcomes, and it is an important part of how we build a more connected and liveable Canberra.

The effective delivery of infrastructure depends on selecting the right procurement approach. We continue to use a mix of delivery models. Traditional design and construct contracts are used where projects are well-defined. Collaborative models, including alliances and early contractor involvement, are used where projects are more complex. For major long-term assets, the availability of public-private partnerships is an important option. These models—the PPP models—are particularly suited to projects such as light rail and major convention and entertainment facilities. They allow private sector expertise to be applied across design, construction, maintenance and operation. They provide certainty of performance and whole-of-life value. Our approach is practical and tailored to each project type.

It is also important to acknowledge that climate resilience is being embedded across the program. Stormwater systems are being upgraded to manage more intense rainfall, and that is a major feature of works that have been occurring in the CBD over the last 18 months. Urban cooling is being improved through tree canopy expansion and green space. Infrastructure is being designed to withstand higher temperatures and more diverse weather events. These measures ensure that assets continue to function effectively in a changing climate.

Health infrastructure remains the largest area of investment. At the Canberra Hospital precinct, the critical services building, recently completed, is delivering significantly expanded clinical capacity, including the additional operating theatres and intensive care facilities. At North Canberra Hospital, the major infrastructure project for the rest of this decade, the new facilities will significantly improve emergency care and inpatient services. In Tuggeranong, the South Tuggeranong Health Centre will bring services closer to the community, reducing pressure on major hospitals. Across the system, investment in community health facilities and digital systems is improving accessibility and efficiency, and this is what our growing city requires from its health system.

Housing is of course a central priority. It has been discussed at length this week. The relationship between housing and infrastructure is clear. Housing supply depends on the timely delivery of roads, utilities, public transport and community facilities. In Gungahlin, infrastructure is supporting continued growth in suburbs such as Taylor, Throsby and Jacka. In Molonglo, investment in roads and services is enabling the expansion in Whitlam and Denman Prospect. In the city and inner north, transport investment and public realm improvements are supporting significantly higher density and missing middle living.

At the same time, broader planning reform is supporting these outcomes. The missing middle reforms will increase housing choice in other established areas of Canberra. They will support a gentle increase in density, and they will make better use of our existing infrastructure. And they will bring renewed focus to infrastructure renewal in those areas. Of course, as population density increases, the supporting infrastructure must also be upgraded. That includes things like roads, drainage, public spaces and community facilities. This, of course, is a coordinated approach.

Transport infrastructure investments continue to transform how Canberra functions. The electrification of the bus fleet and the rapid electrification of the private vehicle fleet continue, supported by upgrades to our public depot infrastructure and our public electric vehicle charging infrastructure. Light rail of course remains a central element of the expanded public transport network. Stage 2A is ahead of schedule and progressing to Commonwealth Park. Planning continues for stage 2B to Woden. These projects—all of them—connect key centres, support urban renewal and improve access to employment.

In our road network, upgrades to William Hovell Drive, Drakeford Drive and Gundaroo Drive are supporting new housing and improving safety and efficiency. These investments are improving reliability, reducing emissions and supporting a more efficient transport system.

Investment in emergency services infrastructure is also a priority, and as the population grows, it is essential that response capability keeps pace. Over the coming years there will be investments, including new and upgraded fire and ambulance stations in growth areas such as Molonglo and Gungahlin. It also includes improvements to existing facilities across the territory and includes investment in training and operational infrastructure. These investments ensure strong response times and support safety for the community.

As we have been touching on this afternoon, in growing areas community infrastructure is essential. In Gungahlin and Molonglo, new and upgraded sporting facilities will support participation and active lifestyles. Playing fields, community facilities and associated infrastructure will be delivered alongside population growth, and there will be more investment in these priorities in coming years. Across the territory, upgrades to existing facilities will seek to improve access and quality, and renewing and replacing aging facilities will indeed be a priority. These investments will support wellbeing and community connection.

As Canberra matures or ages, or however we like to describe the passing of time, some

parts of our city are very old compared to other parts. Infrastructure renewal therefore becomes increasingly important. Significant investment is currently being directed towards upgrading existing assets, and this will increase in the future. This includes road rehabilitation, rehabilitation of stormwater improvements, and renewing public housing and community facilities, and this work of course supports reliability and maintains service standards across the city.

The program aims to deliver across the entire territory. In Tuggeranong, health and transport investments are improving access and connectivity. In Gungahlin, new infrastructure will support rapid growth, including new schools and sporting facilities. In Belconnen, hospital upgrades and community investments are strengthening services. In Woden, the hospital precinct and the future light rail are, of course, central. In Molonglo, infrastructure is enabling continued expansion, including new schools, emergency service facilities and sporting facilities. In Weston Creek, stormwater upgrades and local infrastructure improvements is ensuring that the established suburbs in Weston Creek continue to perform well. In the city, inner north and inner south, light rail and urban renewal are, of course, reshaping these regions.

Mr Speaker, the next decade will see Canberra continue its evolution into a medium-sized city. That brings opportunity, but it also requires discipline. We will continue to plan carefully. We will continue to deliver consistently, and we will continue to refine the program as the city grows. The infrastructure investment program reflects a practical approach to managing our city's growth. It supports productivity, enables housing, strengthens services and renews the infrastructure we already have. It is grounded in a partnership with the commonwealth; it is responsive to the national infrastructure market; and it is aligned with Canberra's future as a modern medium-sized city. I commend the program to the Assembly.

I present the following paper:

The infrastructure pipeline—Ministerial statement, 11 June 2026.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

**MS CARRICK** (Murrumbidgee) (4.31): Another ministerial statement that has not listened to us. If you do not laugh, you would cry! Ten years ago, when I came in to see Minister Gentleman, he said to me, "What more do you want, Fiona? You are getting a hospital and a tram." And I said, "We want social infrastructure." That was 10 years ago, when we were losing it. And we have got a commitment to a 50-metre pool, and we have heard talk about an indoor sports stadium, but we never see it.

Yet again, in every glossy that comes out, and every budget, we talk about hospitals and trams for Woden, even though they are for everybody. The last time I checked, the Canberra Hospital was a tertiary hospital for the whole of south-east New South Wales, but it always gets pinned on Woden: "Look at you, you've got a hospital!" Well, you know, we are very thankful for that, but it is everybody's—just like you say this city is everybody's. Every time there is a budget or a glossy, that is what we get, and yet again today that is what is mentioned for Woden—a hospital and a tram.

The Chief Minister said, “Community infrastructure is essential.” Like, really? When? In what decade? No mention of the 50-metre pool or the indoor stadium. But the government has backflipped on the Woden community centre that was promised years ago. It is now going to be a lease in a commercial building. I think that is going backwards.

The intention is to move Access Canberra to the Woden Library. Where? Are you going to take the meeting rooms that you finally gave us in the library? We are going backwards. Weston Creek is getting stormwater upgrades!

And the one that really blows my mind is the intent to investigate the expansion of the Woden Cemetery. We are doing the heavy lifting with a cemetery in the middle of our town centre. Do not expand the Woden Cemetery. Do not expand it into Eddison Park. If you want to expand it, put it in John Knight park, but do not expand it in Eddison Park!

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **Planning—missing middle housing**

**MR STEEL** (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage and Minister for Transport) (4.34): I rise today to speak to Major Plan Amendment 04—the Missing Middle Housing Reforms, and to the government response to the Standing Committee Environment and Planning’s Report No 6 into the amendment. The presentation of the major plan amendment to the Assembly on 26 May marked a significant milestone in the progress of these landmark reforms and, in accordance with the Planning Act 2023, commenced the five sitting-day period in which members of the Assembly could choose to move motions to reject or partially reject these amendments.

The government has taken a collaborative approach to development. I would like to acknowledge the officials in the City and Environment Directorate, members of the Technical Advisory Group and Pool of Practitioners, and Canberrans who engaged with last year’s public consultation process that helped shape the reforms that are currently before the Assembly. I would also like to acknowledge the committee for their inquiry into the proposed amendment to the Territory Plan, with changes being made to both the draft plan amendment and supporting Missing Middle Housing Design Guide in response to their recommendations to support better consideration of character at the development level, whilst recognising the role of new housing typologies in shaping our suburbs over time.

This has been done through refinements to the residential zones policy to explicitly the capture design zone policy outcomes and streetscape character, and public domain impacts related to parking, and updates to the supporting documents; amendments to residential zone technical specifications to clarify requirements for private open spaces, and community and principal private open spaces, to ensure that they prioritise site amenity and living infrastructure; and updates to the Missing Middle Housing Design Guide to strengthen guidance on the character and context of local landscape and heritage consideration—building on the updates made to the residential zones policy

following community consultation—for both block consolidation and built form outcomes.

Mr Speaker, it would be remiss of me not to acknowledge members of the Assembly who have engaged and contributed to these reforms. In particular, Ms Clay, as the Greens spokesperson for planning and urban renewal, and Mrs Morris as the shadow minister for planning. For ACT Labor and the ACT Greens in particular, this is a significant milestone in delivering on our parties' shared commitment to undertake planning and zoning changes to support low-rise missing middle housing in existing residential areas, including RZ1 zones, within this term of government.

I would like to take the opportunity to provide the following commitments in response to matters raised by the ACT Greens, in seeking assurance to support the passage of the reform through the Assembly. Several of these matters related to ongoing monitoring and public reporting on the uptake of missing middle housing and the related impacts to transport, parking, amenity, green space and more.

I would like to assure the Greens and the Assembly that the ACT government will monitor and report on the uptake of missing middle housing. This will include reporting on the different typologies and distribution across the city. The related impacts of missing middle housing developments—such as to transport, parking, amenity, green space and others—will be captured and evaluated as part of the existing planning outcomes evaluation component of the planning system evaluation framework. This will consider the design impacts of the outcomes-focused planning system for a variety of different development types, including missing middle developments, and the assessment of built outcomes against the good practice guidance in the Missing Middle Housing Design Guide.

Outlined earlier in this statement, the Major Plan Amendment, as presented to the Assembly, also proposes to strengthen the consideration of the cumulative impacts of development, with a particular emphasis on development being contextually appropriate and contributing positively to the evolving character and function of our suburbs. Building on this work, and in response to matters raised by the Greens, the government will also explore opportunities to further integrate these considerations in future reviews of the district strategies. I also note that my colleague the Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water will also be talking to the monitoring and reporting of environmental matters, including urban heat and tree canopy cover.

It is proposed that the uptake of missing middle housing will be reported on at least annually through the planning website, alongside existing public reporting on development applications and approval statistics. Complementary data—including through the building and construction reports published regularly by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, and ACT Land and Property Reports—will continue to be published.

I also welcome the Greens interest in pursuing inclusionary zoning as one of the mechanisms to deliver public and community housing on leased land. In my Statement of Planning Priorities 2025-28, I have asked the City and Environment Directorate to examine further opportunities to encourage affordable and community housing on leased land through inclusionary zoning reform. The directorate is currently working

on this, especially in the context of major precinct developments and redevelopments which have been proposed by the private sector, and I expect to be briefed on options on this in the coming months. I remain committed to exploring opportunities for inclusionary requirements in precinct-scale development at key sites and change areas.

Alongside this work, the ACT government is conducting a broader review of the Lease Variation Charge framework to ensure it remains fit for purpose in supporting the government's housing objectives, as announced through the 2026-27 budget. The government considers the Lease Variation Charge as an important mechanism to capture value for public benefit where development rights and land value is uplifted and that LVC and associated targeted remissions can work alongside the planning system requirements to ensure that infill development occurs in a way that maximises the use of existing infrastructure and provides facilities and amenity for existing and new residents.

This review will explore how LVC and possible reductions or remissions could support desired development outcomes, the delivery of social infrastructure and improved amenity, and affordable, social public housing in urban renewal precincts. It will also investigate options for administrative process reform to provide more certainty, fewer disputes and quicker decisions. This will include consideration of increased codification of the system. The review is expected to be completed over the next 12 months and will be informed by independent expert advice, alongside ongoing consultation with industry stakeholders and the broader community, with a discussion paper on the findings of the review to be published after being considered by government.

Lastly, the government is progressing work to establish an urban growth boundary and to determine its placement within future strategic planning, including integration as part of the new planning and transport strategy and the landscape plan, to be led by the recent appointment of the ACT government Landscape Architect. I note the Assembly will continue to receive regular updates on the urban growth boundary through the half-yearly reports published by the ACT government, which commenced in the first Assembly sittings of this year.

Mr Speaker, my hope is that by tomorrow, when this disallowance period ends, together, this Assembly will have supported the Missing Middle Housing Reforms, and, together, will have enabled the delivery of much needed housing across our city that is well-designed, sustainable and meets the different needs of all Canberrans. The Missing Middle Housing Reforms are about providing more homes for Canberrans where they want to live and making sure we can keep what we love about our suburbs, while providing more housing for current and future generations.

I commend the statement to the Assembly.

I present the following paper:

Missing middle housing—Ministerial statement, 11 June 2026.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

**MS ORR** (Yerrabi—Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water, Minister for Disability, Carers and Community Services and Minister for Seniors and Veterans) (4.42): I rise today to confirm several matters relevant to the approval of Major Plan Amendment 04—Missing Middle Housing Reforms, and the government response to the report by the Standing Committee on Environment and Planning into the draft major plan amendment.

As my colleague the planning minister noted, the Greens have engaged with my office to seek assurance on several items to inform their decision to support the passage of this through the Assembly. I note that many of the matters inquired about are existing ACT government policy and commitments. I would also like to note the Greens' continued work on these reforms and would like to thank them for their ongoing engagement in this work.

Confirmation has been sought on the ACT government's public commitment to monitor and report on the missing middle housing reforms in relation to climate impacts, access to green space and habitat protection. I would like to assure the Assembly that the ACT government will continue to undertake monitoring and reporting as they relate to climate impacts for the city.

In relation to regular reporting on Canberra's urban heat risk, the ACT government is currently finalising an urban heat mapping and analysis project for Canberra, based on satellite data from the summer of 2025, with this work expected to be available before the end of 2026. This will provide a city-wide assessment of the urban heat island effect and will provide a robust baseline assessment of urban heat conditions in Canberra.

As part of this work, a potential urban heat island index—UHI—for Canberra is being assessed. As well as a value for the whole of urban Canberra, the UHI may also be calculated by "local climate zones" which classify areas by the density of development, among other factors. This index can potentially be used to identify changes and trends across the city by land use type and help in understanding potential contributing factors. The urban heat mapping will assist in identifying specific areas of risk and allow the government to undertake informed consideration of areas requiring further investment.

In the 2026-27 budget released yesterday, the government has allocated funds to undertake a study of heat mitigation options in areas identified in the urban heat mapping work that are significantly hotter than average. The government also acknowledges the importance of ongoing risk-based consideration of extreme heat events and will be informed by both technical capability and advice from relevant agencies, including ACT Health and the Chief Health Officer, on future reporting for this work.

In addition, in yesterday's budget, the government committed to a second climate change risk assessment for the ACT. Extreme heat impacting on human health is one of the major climate risks that the ACT and Canberrans face. The new risk assessment to be undertaken over the next two years will have heat risk as a key focus area.

Further work and investment to understand and reverse the trends in declining urban

tree canopy cover will be undertaken in addition to the five-year LiDAR reporting. Information generated through the ACT government's established monitoring program and five-yearly LiDAR data capture and analysis across urban Canberra supports ongoing understanding of tree canopy cover.

This has been used to guide understanding and assessment of individual development applications. Additional work to support this includes a current project underway to model and understand the pathways for Canberra to meet the 30 per cent tree canopy cover target by 2045. This will include consideration of the effects of policies, such as the missing middle housing reforms, and will provide advice regarding the achievement of canopy targets. The final report is anticipated to be delivered by the end of 2026.

The ACT government will also continue reporting on the number of trees removed and replanted on leased land under the Urban Forest Act through annual reporting as a requirement of the act. I can also confirm that the government is committed to actions under the Living Infrastructure Plan. As reported in the 2023-24 minister's annual report, under the Climate Change and Greenhouse Gas Reduction Act 2010, the government has completed an inventory and mapping of the infrastructure.

The City and Environment Directorate continue to maintain the urban tree asset register and map all subsurface irrigation systems on their estate to further support the delivery of maintenance activities in irrigated living infrastructure. As well as tree canopy cover, the 2025 LiDAR analysis will also provide an assessment of surface permeability across Canberra and by district. The government is currently finalising work to be able to release this information publicly, expected before the end of this year.

The government is also committed to ongoing work around microclimate assessments, especially for significant developments, to assist in mitigating urban heat and runoff impacts, including with targeted city cooling initiatives. For example, a microclimate assessment was undertaken as part of the north Curtin development. In addition, a microclimate assessment guide will be released publicly in coming months, which will provide guidance to those proposing smaller developments on how to undertake low-cost microclimate assessments.

The ACT government continues to commit to environment and climate action, including monitoring and measuring climate impacts, as these relate to a range of policies and reforms across Canberra. I again encourage the Assembly to support MPA-04. Together with the Missing Middle Housing Design Guide, it will help the delivery of much-needed sustainable housing across existing residential areas.

**MS CLAY** (Ginninderra) (4.47): I want to thank the planning minister and the climate and environment minister. I particularly want to thank the planning minister for his hard work on these reforms, and for his excellent engagement with our office. His staff have been really generous with their time, in explaining how this all works. I want to thank CED, who have done a really good job on this.

The Greens have long advocated for an increase in density and for an urban growth boundary. For us, those two things go together. We need to protect our environment, and we need to stop our city sprawling endlessly. To do that, we need to make sure that we have more missing middle housing and more density within our footprint.

Canberra's population will keep growing. It makes sense that we better use our existing footprint to provide the homes that we need. Canberrans themselves want more homes that are close to shops, public transport, jobs and community facilities. People want homes near the stuff that they want to use.

Canberrans are pretty supportive of different types of housing. We do not have a good range at the moment. People want row houses, terrace houses and townhouses, all through our suburbs. I want to make sure that we get the right houses in the right places.

The Greens are keen to see these missing middle reforms progress. We took a missing middle election platform to the last election. We called on bringing in this type of reform, and we lobbied quite hard for that. We brought forward a motion in the Assembly, early in the start of the term, to kick this work off and to make sure that the project was running.

Alongside that, we brought in the motion—and we got parliamentary support for that—to set the urban growth boundary and protect the western edge. It is a whole piece of work. This is a piece of work to shape our city for generations, and this is a piece of work that we are pleased to see looks like being delivered in this term.

I acknowledge that there is a really high level of interest from the community. There are people who are enthusiastic about these reforms. There are people desperately in need of a home. There are people who cannot afford their homes at the moment and want more choices in the market than they currently see. There are also a lot of people who are anxious about change. It is really important that we see these reforms rolling out well, that the systems are set up well, that what we see on the ground is built to a high quality and that people do not lose the standard of living that they have now.

The Greens will be supporting these reforms. We think they are ready, and we will not be moving a motion for disallowance. This is how we will get the homes that we need within our footprint and how we will protect our environment while we do it. It is important, though, that we get that balance right. The Greens have looked at this really carefully, and I thank both ministers for their public statements today. We did want to make sure that we got the right protections in place and some of the right monitoring.

We do not want to lose tree canopy cover. The ACT at the moment is going backwards on tree canopy cover, and that was as a result of development. It is really important that we have appropriate monitoring and protection in place. There have been changes here for private open spaces. We need to make sure that everybody has access to good-quality green space and open space. We need to make sure that that is also getting monitored, as we go.

It is really important that we watch the urban heat island effect in a changing climate and that we do not simply see Canberra getting hotter. Again, that is why we need very particular monitoring, and we will need government to intervene if it is not going the right way.

We need enough public and community housing. The Greens and the ACT Labor government are keen on inclusionary zoning. That is one of the ways that will help. We

are also pleased to see government committing to more public and community housing. That needs to be amplified.

We need to look after the people who are living in these homes. We need to make sure that they have the infrastructure they need. They need to get the right public transport—frequent enough public transport. They need access to parks and playgrounds, and those are not currently distributed evenly around Canberra. They need to get these facilities as we grow. They should not simply have to wait until the population gets to bursting point before they get those facilities.

We need good design on these. We need government to carefully monitor these individual planning decisions. We have had a fairly good explanation that that will happen. The planning decisions that are made need to take into account the cumulative impact of all these separate, minor decisions and how those add up for the whole suburb. It needs to do that for issues like parking, transport and access to facilities. It also needs to do that for access to green space, tree canopy coverage and habitat.

The Greens did have a number of specific asks around climate adaptation, and that is because our community is asking for that. Our community is really worried about that. We are getting hotter summers, and they are getting hotter every year. There has been a bit of chat on one of the threads I am on today about whether today might be one of the hottest winter days that we have seen, possibly, on record or for a long time. People need to know that we are keeping our city cool and keeping our climate stable at a micro level, and that we are looking after the habitat for our wildlife and making sure that we are developing well.

That is why we have asked for a few things like regular reporting on urban heat risk, including identifying the areas of our city at highest risk, and work on and investment in our urban tree canopy. The trees are declining at the moment. We need to understand why. We need to reverse that. There needs to be reinvestment and refreshment of actions under the Living Infrastructure Plan. The living infrastructure, our trees, our green space and our waterways, are a critical part of adapting to climate change in future. We need to protect what we have and improve what we have. We need to make sure that we are doing this work well and taking Canberra along with us on the journey.

We welcome these reforms today. We will watch them with keen interest and a high level of scrutiny. We are pleased to see the work that has gone into it to date. We are enthusiastic to see Canberra developing well and sustainably in the future. We will make sure that we are monitoring it well, so that that happens.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **Budget—education and housing 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) (4.54): In the interests of time, I will table a copy of my statement. I present the following paper:

Budget Investments—Ministerial statement, Thursday, 11 June 2026.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

### **Budget—health Ministerial statement**

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH** (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (4.54): In the interests of time, I will also table a copy of my statement. I present the following paper:

Budget Investments—Ministerial statement, 11 June 2026.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

### **Budget—justice 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) (4.54): In the interests of time, I will table a copy of my statement. I present the following paper:

Budget Investments—Ministerial statement, 11 June 2026.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

### **Legal Affairs—Standing Committee Amendment to reporting date**

**MS BARRY** (Ginninderra) (4.55): I move:

That, notwithstanding standing order 174(d), the Standing Committee on Legal Affairs shall present its report on the Bail Amendment Bill 2026 by 26 August 2026.

The Standing Committee on Legal Affairs is currently considering submissions received from the inquiry into the Bail Amendment Bill 2026. The committee noted the

importance of this bill and the timing of the inquiry falling over the upcoming school holiday and estimates hearing period. An extension until 26 August 2026 will give the committee enough time to give the bill and evidence presented to the committee the consideration that it deserves prior to providing a report.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

### **Amendment to reporting date**

**MS BARRY** (Ginninderra) (4.56): I move:

That, notwithstanding standing order 174(d), the Standing Committee on Legal Affairs shall present its report on the Crimes (Coercive Control) Amendment Bill 2026 by 11 September 2026.

The Standing Committee on Legal Affairs has resolved to undertake an inquiry into the Crimes (Coercive Control) Amendment Bill 2026 and is currently accepting submissions. The committee noted the importance of this bill and the timing of the inquiry falling over the upcoming school holiday and estimates hearing period. An extension until 11 September 2026 will give the committee enough time to give the bill and the evidence presented to the committee the consideration that it deserves prior to providing a report.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

### **ACT public service—order to table documents**

**MR PARTON** (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (4.57): I move:

That, in accordance with standing order 213A, the Assembly orders the government to provide the Assembly with documents regarding:

- (1) any workforce reduction targets provided to directorates arising from fiscal sustainability measures;
- (2) information pertaining to the expected impact of voluntary redundancies on service delivery and staffing levels within each affected directorate;
- (3) the advice provided to directorates regarding workforce savings associated with Machinery of Government reforms; and
- (4) communication to ACT Public Service staff regarding commitments made to staff pertaining to redundancies during the Machinery of Government process and whether those commitments remain in force.

This motion is about transparency. Yesterday, the Treasurer told Canberrans that the government could improve the territory's finances without deep cuts to services and without slashing the public service. At the same time, the budget relies on constraining expenditure growth and delivering efficiencies through machinery-of-government reforms, and, if that is the government's plan, then the Assembly and the community are entitled to understand how those savings are being delivered.

Over recent weeks, there have been growing reports of voluntary redundancy programs,

workforce reduction targets and savings exercises occurring across parts of the ACT public service and, as each day goes by, we have found out a little bit more about them—but we would like to find out more. Staff are being asked questions they cannot answer. Unions are seeking information. Ultimately, the people who rely on government services are entitled to know what impact these decisions may have.

The motion does not seek cabinet documents; it does not seek confidential deliberations. It seeks the information underpinning decisions that are already being implemented.

Firstly, if directorates have been given workforce reduction targets as part of the government's fiscal sustainability agenda, then the Assembly should know what those targets are.

Secondly, if voluntary redundancies are being pursued—which they are—what analysis has been undertaken regarding the impact on staffing levels and service delivery? Governments often speak about efficiencies. Every position removed represents work that still needs to be done by somebody. Before staff leave, what assessment has been made of the consequences?

Thirdly, the government has repeatedly pointed to machinery-of-government reforms as a mechanism for delivering savings and the Assembly, in my view, should be provided with the advice that explains how those savings are expected to occur and whether workforce reductions form a part of that strategy.

Finally, there are serious questions about assurances provided to public servants during the machinery-of-government process. Many staff understood that the reforms were about moving functions and improving coordination, not reducing headcount. If commitments were made to staff regarding redundancies, I think the Assembly should know what those commitments were and whether the government still stands by them today.

This is a government that has spent months defending its fiscal management. The independent fiscal sustainability review found that the deterioration in the territory's finances was the result of policy choices made by government—and now the government is asking the public service to help repair that position. If workforce reductions are being pursued because of the territory's fiscal circumstances, then the government should be prepared to be transparent about the targets, the rationale and the consequences.

It is getting late in the day. I am not going to bang on anymore. You have heard enough from me. The motion seeks nothing more than transparency, and I commend it to the Assembly.

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH** (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (5.00):

I move the following amendment:

“(5) notwithstanding provisions of standing order 213A, material is to be provided

no later than 17 July 2026.”.

This is an extension to the provision of material that will still see it provided prior to the estimates period.

I do want to clarify a couple of points in relation to this motion. In the interests of time, I am not intending to speak for very long, but I just want to clarify that no workforce reduction targets have been provided to directorates.

What directorates are aware of is the full-time equivalent staffing numbers that have been funded for each directorate. Those are set out at Appendix K of the budget outlook, so it is transparently available to all members of the Legislative Assembly to see what the funded full-time equivalent staff were for 2025-26, what the budget was for 2025-26, what the actual has been for 2025-26 and what the budget funds for 2026-27.

Those numbers show that the public service will continue to grow. We have, indeed, through the budget, added investment in a range of areas including ambulance, city services and others. But we have said to the directors-general that we expect them to manage within the budget that has been allocated to them. These are growing budgets and these are growing workforces across the whole of the public service.

But there has been some restructuring of the public service and that has enabled staff to identify opportunities where things can be done more efficiently. One of the things that we are doing in implementing this restructuring fund is enabling staff to identify areas where they think that things can be done more efficiently: where areas have been brought together; where staff are doing similar types of activities; or where, by collaborating more closely together and breaking down those silos, they can actually deliver the same quality of services or the same quality of advice to ministers with a more efficient number of people.

I think we have been very, very clear that this is a voluntary process and, in terms of City and Environment Directorate which has offered voluntary redundancies under the process to date, we have seen strong interest from a number of public servants in taking a voluntary redundancy. That process will be managed very carefully. Not everyone who puts their hand up for a voluntary redundancy will get one, because it may be determined that their skills, expertise or position are critically important to the continued operation of the directorate.

And not everyone who is offered a voluntary redundancy, after it goes through that process of assessment, will be compelled to take one either. That is also very important.

There will be consultation with every work group where there is a potential for staffing numbers to be reduced, to ensure that workload can be reduced or work can be reallocated. We have been very clear with our public servants—and I want to be very clear in this place—that this process is not about asking our fantastic, hardworking public servants to do more with less. It is about listening to them, to identify areas of efficiency. It is also about continuing to invest in our public service into the future, in line with our fiscal strategy which has been updated to say that we aim for the public service not to grow more quickly than the ACT population—recognising that the public service has grown by about 30 per cent since 2018-19.

In the interests of time, I will stop there. I think my amendment is going to be supported and I appreciate people's consideration of that.

**MS CLAY** (Ginninderra) (5.05): The Greens are happy to support Mr Parton's motion and the minister's amendment. A key aspect of topics that was discussed on the fiscal sustainability committee has been the public sector workforce. There are a few reasons for that. The Auditor-General has also pointed this out a few times. There has been significant growth in the public sector over the last few years. ACT government employment increased by 14 per cent between June 2022 and June 2025; a larger increase than for combined state and local government employment in any other state or territory, and almost four percentage points more than the average for all states and territories.

The *State of the Service Report* reveals to us that the ACT Public Service had 23,045 full-time equivalent employees in 2021. A few years later, by June 2025, that had grown to 28,182. That is a 22 per cent increase over four years. Now, it is great that we have the people that we need to deliver services for Canberrans, but I am puzzled as to why government expanded so quickly without doing the long-term planning and without raising the revenue to support those positions—and that looks like where we are up to now. It does look like a bit of short-termism and I am not sure how that happened.

The budget papers yesterday were not hugely helpful in shining any extra light on that situation. Now, the following comes from page 85 of the budget outlook. It says:

As part of this initiative, the Government will provide funding for a time-limited restructure program over the next two years to assist agencies and Directorates to make long-term workforce decisions to ensure financial sustainability. This fund will provide voluntary redundancy packages across the ACT Public Service. Staff participation will be voluntary, and decisions will be guided by the need to maintain delivery of priority government work and essential services.

It is a bit vague, but it looks like rolling voluntary redundancies and recruitment freezes for the rest of the term, with a big dump of savings expected, maybe in 2029. So, whoever wins the next election is going to have a really good time with those savings.

We have heard a little bit more today from the Minister for the Public Service, but it is light on detail and I am, again, puzzled as to why that long-term planning was not done when the public service was expanding so rapidly and why it is now having to be done. It looks like playing catch-up.

So, where the Greens are at: we are also keen for more information. We would love to know how the government is managing and handling its voluntary redundancy schemes; how that is being done to look after the workforce and the people; and how it is making sure that we are not losing any community services, and that we are not overloading public servants with more work by reducing the people doing that work. Where are those being centred? How is it comparing to other available evidence? This motion is requesting some really useful information.

There is something else that is useful and related. We have heard a lot about enterprise bargaining in the Education Directorate over the last few weeks but, of course, this is

not just about teachers; this is a service-wide issue. Enterprise bargaining has stalled across the whole of the ACT public sector, and we have reasons to believe that more protected-action ballots are being planned by relevant unions at the moment so that more public servants can take protected industrial action.

Most enterprise agreements covering the ACT public sector workers nominally expired in March. The budget does not reveal anything about how the government plans to resolve bargaining, either. There is nothing in there about an improved pay offer. The ACT government appears to have difficulties managing the workforce and explaining how it is managing the workforce. So, we are keen to see some of this information come through from this motion. We are happy to support the motion and the amendment.

**MR COCKS** (Murrumbidgee) (5.09): I just want to speak briefly because I think it is incredibly important that we get this information, because the picture is clearly not as rosy as the minister has set out. I am very glad that she pointed to the budget—as indeed did Ms Clay—because on page 242 of the budget outlook you will find the forecast of public service wages and salaries. In that table, what you will see is that, starting from the budget year and following into subsequent years, in 2027-28 there is a roughly 2.26 per cent reduction in the wages and salaries bill across the service. That seems to be without factoring in any sort of pay rise. It would have to be some sort of redundancy program.

And indeed, even in the following year, the total value of public service salaries would still be below the budget year. Indeed, when you go to the final year of the budget estimates period, the entire value of public service wages and salaries will only be 2.61 per cent higher than in the budget year.

It is impossible to see any way that the government could manage this without a very significant number of redundancies on the board. This is why it is so important that we see exactly what the assumptions are behind the government's numbers. Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Amendment agreed to.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

## **Standing orders—suspension**

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

That so much of the standing orders be suspended as would prevent Committee business being called on forthwith.

## **Integrity Commission and Statutory Office Holders—Standing Committee**

### **Statement by chair**

**MS LEE** (Kurrajong) (5.12): Pursuant to standing order 246A, I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on the Integrity Commission and Statutory Office Holders relating to its consideration of funding for the Office of the

Legislative Assembly and officers of the Assembly.

The Financial Management Act 1996 requires that the Speaker consult with the committee on the recommended appropriation for both the Office of the Legislative Assembly and the various officers of the Assembly. In support of this process, the committee was provided with the recommended appropriation for the ACT Audit Office on 28 May 2026, the recommended appropriation for the ACT Integrity Commission on 27 May 2026, the recommended appropriation for the ACT Electoral Commission on 26 May 2026 and the recommended funding level for the ACT Ombudsman on 30 April 2026.

The committee considered business cases for additional funding proposals for the Office of the Legislative Assembly in February 2026, but the recommended appropriation for the Office of the Legislative Assembly had not been received before 2 June 2026. The committee understands that these were provided for consultation as soon as they became available. Nonetheless, the timing of the consultation process established under the budget protocols agreed by the Speaker and the Chief Minister raises questions about what opportunity this provides for the committee to have timely input into the consideration of recommended appropriations and funding levels.

The committee intends to give further consideration to its role in relation to these budget proposals and will report back to the Speaker in due course.

## **Social Policy—Standing Committee**

### **Statement by chair**

**MR EMERSON** (Kurrajong) (5.13): Pursuant to standing order 246A, I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Social Policy relating to its consideration of a potential inquiry into extremist political ideologies and belief systems in the ACT.

On 17 September 2025, following anti-immigration rallies held in Canberra on 31 August 2025, the Assembly passed a resolution which requested the committee to inquire into the re-emergence and rising prevalence of extremist political ideologies and belief systems in the ACT.

The committee considered this matter at eight private meetings between September 2025 and June this year. This included consideration of: the update by the Minister for Multicultural Affairs to the Assembly on 27 May 2026, which detailed activities by the ACT government to strengthen protections against racial vilification, hate speech and discrimination, including ongoing stakeholder consultation and planned legislative reforms; parliamentary inquiries in recent years into related matters at both the territory and federal level; and the federal government's response to the Bondi terrorist attack in December last year, including the ongoing work of the royal commission.

The committee notes that these activities seek to address several areas that could overlap with a potential inquiry by this committee, including options to strengthen social cohesion and counter the spread of ideologically and religiously motivated extremism and vilification. As such, the committee has decided not to undertake an inquiry at this time.

## **Standing committees Membership**

Motion (by **Miss Nuttall**) pursuant to standing order 223, agreed to:

That Ms Vassarotti be appointed to the Standing Committee on Economics, Industry and Recreation and the Standing Committee on Legal Affairs.

## **Emergencies Amendment Bill 2026**

**Dr Paterson**, pursuant to notice, presented the bill, its explanatory statement and a Human Rights Act compatibility statement.

Title read by Clerk.

**DR PATERSON** (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services, Minister for Women, Minister for the Prevention of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence, Minister for Corrections and Minister for Gaming Reform) (5.17): I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

I rise today to present the Emergencies Amendment Bill 2026, a bill that strengthens the ACT's emergency management. This bill will improve the way the government receives expert, community and sector advice on bushfire risk and disaster resilience.

This bill repeals the Multi-Hazards Advisory Council, a statutory model initially established as the ACT Bushfire Council in 2004, with a view to replacing it with a more flexible, adaptive and forward-looking advisory model that reflects the realities of the risk environment that we face today. I want to start by greatly thanking the current members of the advisory council and thank them for their patience while we have navigated the membership issues over the past few months.

Since I became the minister responsible for this portfolio, I have had conversations with members of the Multi-Hazards Advisory Council, as well as attending one of their meetings. I have also met with a range of advocates and talked to volunteers and those who work in emergency management in the ACT.

The feedback was really strong, and the feedback I have received is that the Multi-Hazards Advisory Council has struggled as a model and approach, with too broad a remit. The feedback from members is that there needs to be more improved, targeted, responsive ways to provide advice to the minister, and there needs to be better direction provided to the council and alignment with priorities between council and government. Basically, we can do this better.

The findings of the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements made findings in relation to the flexibility of advisory bodies and the ability to pivot as new risks and consequences emerge. Subsequent work at the national level has reinforced these findings and established more flexible models across the country. Post-disaster reviews have also highlighted the importance of advisory bodies that can

remain adaptable to the challenges present in a dynamic environment and the need to continually review the risk environment and meet the environment with governance that is suitable, adaptable and fit-for-purpose. Rigid statutory councils cannot do this. Flexible non-statutory bodies can.

This bill does two things. It repeals the Multi-Hazards Advisory Council from the Emergencies Act 2004; and it removes statutory obligations tied to the Multi-Hazards Advisory Council, including consultation and reporting requirements, that no longer reflect contemporary practice.

In place of the Multi-Hazards Advisory Council, I will establish two new non-statutory advisory bodies, one aligned with the Strategic Bushfire Management Plan, with a specific focus on bushfire preparation and response, and the other an advisory body with a specific focus on disaster resilience and to be aligned with the ACT Disaster Resilience Strategy. These new advisory bodies will be stood up before the commencement of the 2026-27 high-risk weather season.

We owe it to our community to ensure that the advice government receives is timely, relevant and strategically aligned. The new bushfire advisory body will be a modern, climate-aware advisory body. It will be designed to support implementation of the Strategic Bushfire Management Plan, which integrates ecological resilience, cultural land management, climate science and operational capability. This is not a return to the past; it is an evolution, one that honours the legacy of the former Bushfire Council while recognising that the challenges ahead are different from those behind us.

More adaptive advice means better preparedness, better risk reduction and stronger community resilience. The new advisory bodies will be more inclusive, with greater opportunities for community representatives, volunteers, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge-holders and sector experts to contribute. This strengthens trust, collaboration and shared responsibility—key ingredients of community resilience.

The Emergencies Amendment Bill is a forward-looking reform. It strengthens our emergency management in the ACT. It modernises our governance and ensures that the advice that government receives is as dynamic and adaptive as the risks we face. By strengthening our advisory structures today, we reduce the risks that future Canberrans will face tomorrow. I commend the bill to the Assembly.

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

## **Justice and Community Safety Legislation Amendment Bill 2026**

Debate resumed from 7 May 2026 on motion by **Ms Cheyne**:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

**MR CAIN** (Ginninderra) (5.22): I rise on behalf of the shadow attorney-general, Ms Barry, who is not feeling 100 per cent, so I will read her response in this debate as she has provided it to me:

Thank you, Mr Speaker. I rise to speak just briefly on the Justice and Community Safety Legislation Amendment Bill. It does not do anything overly significant, but it nevertheless makes some minor administrative and procedural changes, and we welcome it. As such, the Canberra Liberals will be supporting this legislation.

This is an omnibus bill, and it is an example of an appropriate case to use an omnibus bill. The government got it right. I am glad to see the government listening to what we have been saying for a while now—that omnibus bills should not be abused to sneak through substantial amendments and stifle proper scrutiny. That being said, it is important to identify some of the amendments contained in this bill that require some vigilance going forward.

First, the amendments to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People Commissioner Act 2022 and Custodial Inspector Act 2017. These amendments introduce information-sharing provisions. While the amendments are sensible to improve agency oversight of the treatment and wellbeing of detainees, we must also recognise that these changes risk reducing the agency of individuals.

They allow the commissioner to disclose personal information to an information-sharing entity in relation to matters concerning Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people without their consent. While a secrecy requirement is taken to apply to such decisions, that information is shared only on the basis that it is reasonably necessary. What satisfies that test, however, is unclear. The amendments provide no factors to consider when deciding against or in favour of sharing information and determining whether it is reasonably necessary. It is a matter of pure discretion for the commissioner.

This presents an oversight issue and is left wanting of accountability. Without any clear guidelines in place, this will clearly need to be monitored closely to ensure that it does not create unwanted and unintentional consequences, particularly as it relates to some of our most vulnerable Canberrans and the privacy of individuals. We should be careful not to inadvertently tolerate any abnegation of rights for the sake of convenience.

Second, I want to put on the record a small concern that I have with regard to the Human Rights Commission Act 2005 amendments. These amendments require that complainants in ACAT matters relating to discrimination, retirement villages, occupancy disputes and conversion practices be granted leave by the ACAT before they can have these matters heard. While these amendments should operate to reduce vexatious and frivolous cases, it concerns me, given the existence of other procedural roadblocks that the ACT Labor government has created limiting the ability of Canberrans to seek legal redress and access justice when it involves review of decisions made by statutory officers. I fear that this amendment may only have the effect of insulating this government further from being held accountable for its own potential breaches.

On balance, given that members of the ACAT will make the determination of whether to grant leave, I am satisfied that enough of a safeguard is built into these amendments. Ultimately, this is a minor and standard efficiency measure for ACAT, which I support. The ACAT has one of the worst backlog rates for civil complaints in the country and action is needed.

Similarly, I welcome the amendments to the Supreme Court Act 1933, which brings the ACT into line with various other jurisdictions. These are sensible and appropriate reforms which—unlike the reforms to the Human Rights Commission

Act—do not involve relying on a determination made by another statutory officeholder and avoiding a reconsideration of matters already determined. Rather, it empowers the courts to dispose of repeat vexatious proceedings on its own, rather than relying on a declaration being made by the Attorney-General or another party.

Mr Speaker, as noted, these are ultimately minor amendments that are agreeable. They are not overly contentious, but the potential adverse consequences associated with some of them should be acknowledged. While some of the changes seek to address inefficiencies in the administration of justice, they are all subtle and, frankly, insignificant overall.

When we talk about addressing the chronic inefficiencies crippling ACT courts and tribunals, the government needs to think more laterally about the bigger systemic issues that are required to alleviate the pressure on our courts. The Canberra Liberals are always receptive to working constructively wherever possible to identify solutions for the betterment of the ACT. Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Those were the words of the shadow attorney-general, Ms Barry.

**MS VASSAROTTI** (Kurrajong) (5.28): The Greens will be supporting this bill, which contains a range of sensible amendments to various pieces of legislation. I was particularly glad to see the amendments to the Electoral Act, which will restore the integrity of our campaign finance disclosure system by ensuring that donations received from a single source in a financial year continue to be reported after they exceed a cumulative total of \$1,000—not just once when they cross that threshold. My thanks go to the Electoral Commission for identifying this issue and productively recommending its timely rectification, and to the parties that have continued to report cumulative donations in spite of this error, consistent with the original intent of the donation disclosure scheme which will be restored today.

The reforms to the Inquiries Act are likewise welcome. The government has not articulated it as such, but these reforms clearly build on learnings associated with the inquiry undertaken by Walter Sofronoff KC and subsequently investigated by the Integrity Commissioner. The clarity that these reforms bring will help us to avoid similar problems arising in future inquiries.

It is also good to see the reforms which improve the sharing of information between the ACT Custodial Inspector and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People Commissioner. Both are part of the National Preventive Mechanism—NPM—the purpose of which is to help safeguard the human rights of people in our secure detention facilities to the standard of the United Nations Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. None of us like it when young people are locked up in Bimberi, but when they are, it gives us some confidence that our NPM organisations are able to effectively understand and collaborate on issues impacting people's wellbeing.

Lastly, we welcome the reforms concerning vexatious litigation. Both in ACAT and in the Supreme Court, these reforms will reduce the burden in the handling of vexatious litigants by empowering the courts to make effective decisions as the circumstances demand. This will improve the efficiency of the court system overall, including by

lowering the costs to people of dealing with vexatious claims. All other amendments appear to be appropriately minor and administrative.

We would like to thank the Attorney-General for the answers to questions—particularly to Mr Braddock’s office—on this bill, which has supported us in being ready for today’s debate. I would also like to recognise the work of Mr Braddock and his office. He took carriage of this matter in my absence as the shadow attorney-general.

**MR EMERSON** (Kurrajong) (5.31): I would like to speak briefly on this bill and I would like to thank the Attorney-General for bringing it before the Assembly. It is important that we see and maintain a legislative system that is agile and able to respond to issues which have been inadvertently created—or have been raised by those experts working in the field and who know what is needed to ensure efficient and effective government systems that best serve members of our community. As other members have remarked, I believe that is what this bill does.

I note the bill was developed in consultation with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People Commissioner, the Office of the ACT Inspector of Custodial Services, the ACT National Preventive Mechanism, the ACT Human Rights Commission, the ACT courts and tribunal, and ACT Electoral Commission. I extend thanks to the individuals working in these roles to best support members of our community.

The specifics of these reforms have been covered by other speakers during the debate, so I just wanted to briefly touch on some of the main reforms included. The changes to facilitate information sharing between oversight bodies working in our carceral system has been raised with my office by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People Commissioner, and I am glad to see this change being made today. Changes like these—to ensure the safety of those who are in the care of the system—are an imperative part of building a stronger society where we have less reoffending and lower levels of incarceration.

The amendment re-inserting the requirement for a political entity to disclose additional gifts once the total amounts of gifts received from a person during a reporting period exceeds \$1,000 will promote transparency and integrity, as the minister outlined in her tabling speech. This requirement was, of course, in the act until 2023 and has been recommended by the Standing Committee on the Integrity Commission and Statutory Office Holders, and the ACT Electoral Commissioner.

The amendments to the Human Rights Commission Act and the Supreme Court Act both aim to ensure that the resources of our judicial system—ACAT and the Supreme Court—are directed appropriately. Reducing the burden of frivolous or vexatious proceedings, or matters that have been sufficiently considered already, is an imperative measure and makes sense to ensure a fair and just legal system—as long as these changes continue to prioritise accessibility for those who need it.

The final change I would like to touch on is the change to the Inquiries Act. I note these changes are in response to issues that have arisen in past boards of inquiry. I also note there is a board of inquiry on the horizon and that these changes will impact that upcoming investigation into Aboriginal deaths in custody in the ACT. As I have heard

from many community members, it is critical that this investigation is conducted in the best way possible. These changes, I hope, will ensure that the process for this and future boards of inquiry is watertight.

Again, I thank the Attorney-General for bringing these changes before the Assembly and I look forward to continuing to work collaboratively in the interests of more efficient and effective systems to serve the people of the ACT.

**MS CHEYNE** (Ginninderra—Manager of Government Business, Attorney-General, Minister for Human Rights, Minister for City and Government Services and Minister for the Night-Time Economy) (5.34), in reply: I thank all members for their contribution today. I particularly thank the legal affairs scrutiny committee for its constructive comments, and I table a revised explanatory statement that addresses the matters raised by the committee in relation to the amendments to section 17 of the Inquiries Act 1991.

It is very pleasing that we have got support to pass this. I will have to check the Hansard, Mr Speaker, but I think I heard, through Mr Cain, from the shadow attorney-general that the government had listened to the concerns about omnibus bills, and that this was a good omnibus bill. The timing does not quite add up because I am pretty sure that we introduced this bill the very next day, after that motion, which would mean that it had already gone through cabinet, et cetera. But I will leave it there and the record can reflect, itself.

So, ultimately, this is a bill that is about improving the operation and accessibility of our justice system. It is making minor and technical amendments across eight pieces of legislation, and these are updates to ensure our laws remain effective, efficient and aligned with community expectations. It is about strengthening courts and tribunals, allowing the Supreme Court to declare a vexatious litigant on its own initiative—and that is reducing the burden on affected parties. It is about requiring leave before certain Human Rights Commission complaints proceed to ACAT, ensuring tribunal resources are focused on matters that genuinely require resolution.

This bill also improves information handling across justice agencies. It enhances information sharing between oversight bodies to support the safety and rights of young people. It strengthens confidentiality and procedural fairness under the Inquiries Act.

It also restores disclosure requirements for political donations, to promote transparency and integrity in elections. I appreciate that that recommendation had been brought to our attention in the interim report regarding the 2024 election and, of course, we know that that needs to be fixed and it should be in there; that is why we are fixing it.

Additional minor amendments correct technical issues and repeal redundant legislation, ensuring clarity and accuracy in the law.

These reforms are modest but they are important. They support efficient courts, better information management, a fair legal framework and a reliable legal framework for the ACT community.

In closing, I wish to particularly thank officers from across the directorates who have worked on this. Obviously, it is not just legislation within my portfolio responsibilities

but I do not think, in any other circumstance, any of these would have been appropriate for a standalone bill. The initiatives have been put forward, presented in this way and I am pleased that everyone has been able to engage with it in good faith. We are very lucky, Mr Speaker, to have terrific officers in the Justice and Community Safety Directorate and in the Parliamentary Counsel's Office, and I think this bill—and soon the acts it will amend—is yet another reflection of their expertise and how well we are served by them. So, I commend it to the chamber.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Bill agreed to in principle.

Leave granted to dispense with the detail stage.

Bill agreed to.

## **Statements by members**

### **Attorney-General**

**MR CAIN** (Ginninderra) (5.39): I want to follow up briefly on my adjournment speech from last night regarding an ultimatum from the Attorney-General, about how I should tell her how to respond to ministerials. I do follow this up because I note that the minister, during the debate yesterday, said, "I have signed several letters to Mr Cain, so it is not as if he has not received any correspondence from my office. He has."

Well, sorry, Mr Speaker, signing something does not mean I get it. So, I am not quite sure if the minister is a bit confused about the relationship between those two events.

But I will say, last night at 8.16 pm and 8.29 pm I did receive two ministerials from the minister. I am not quite sure which staffers she told to stay back and do that job; I hope there is overtime involved for them. I hope the minister is appropriately managing her staff, so they are not working after 8.00 pm on a workday. But I did note the two that were received by me, clearly signed by her, were referrals from Minister Steel and Dr Paterson. They were not actually from her office at all, in original form.

### **National Reconciliation Week**

**MS VASSAROTTI** (Kurrajong) (5.40): I rise to recognise that we have recently commemorated National Reconciliation Week, in which the theme of "all-in" was particularly important this year. As part of the week, on May 27, I was privileged to attend the start of the final leg of Aboriginal elder Travis Lovett's Walk for Truth from Naarm to Canberra. Mr Lovett showed us a different perspective on the value of truth; that it is not about blame, it is about healing. And I want to quote his words:

Reconciliation has to be founded on a process of truth-telling, and that is how we move forward. There is no reconciliation without truth being shared, without justice, and then we can heal, and move forward to a more hopeful, shared and equitable future together.

I also wanted to pay tribute to the work of Selina Walker, on the Reconciliation Action

Council. I understand the frustration behind her recent resignation. I hope we can learn from her work and her advocacy, and continue to engage deeply and work hard to deliver practical reconciliation.

### **Attorney-General**

**MS CHEYNE** (Ginninderra—Manager of Government Business, Attorney-General, Minister for Human Rights, Minister for City and Government Services and Minister for the Night-Time Economy) (5.41): Someone is going to look back in 50 years and think, “What?” Again, Mr Cain is selectively quoting. Let’s reflect on what I actually said yesterday, which was: he wants it on letterhead, he is getting it on letterhead, he should have received it on letterhead. And if he cannot see that it has come through yet, or it has not been sent through via the directorate yet—so I absolutely conceded that that might have been a possibility—I said, “that is unfortunate, but I know that I have signed several”. This tit-for-tat is just exhausting, Mr Speaker, and it is unbecoming. If Mr Cain wants to talk to me about it, he can.

**Mr Cain:** You are doing it, minister. You are doing it. How about you reply to my emails?

**MR SPEAKER:** Mr Cain—

**MS CHEYNE:** For someone who wants to be a committee chair, I think he is really showing how unfit he actually is.

### **Mr David Pennock AFSM—King’s Birthday Honours**

**MS TOUGH** (Brindabella) (5.42): I am rising today to acknowledge David Pennock and his remarkable service to the ACT Rural Fire Service over more than 30 years, and to congratulate him on being awarded the Australian Fire Service Medal in the Kings Birthday Honours this week.

As captain of the Southern ACT Bush Fire Brigade, David has shown outstanding leadership, fostering strong comradery and supporting those around him as a trusted mentor and friend. He has played an important role in some of Canberra’s most challenging bush fire events including the fires of 2001, 2003 and the 2019-20 Black Summer fires, demonstrating courage and commitment in protecting our community. This honour, recognised this week in the 2026 Kings Birthday Honours, reflects not only David’s dedication, but also his contribution to the spirit of service that helps shape our nation.

I first met Dave a couple of months ago, when he and another member of Southern brigade came to visit me at the Tuggeranong library mobile office. And we spent well over an hour having a chat about all thing’s rural firefighting, Tharwa, Lanyon, Canberra, bushfires—it was a wonderful chat. A week or so after that, Minister Paterson and I went out to Southern at Tharwa for a barbecue and a tour, and to be there for their end-of-season meeting. It was a really fun night, getting to meet David and the team, and everyone there. So, congratulations, David, and thank you for your service.

*Discussion concluded.*

## Adjournment

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

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

### **Standing Committee on Social Policy— inquiry into men’s suicide rates**

**MR PARTON** (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (5.44): Because things were getting on yesterday, I chose not to speak to the announcement from Mr Emerson as Chair of the Standing Committee on Social Policy and their inquiry into men’s suicide rates. However, I think it is important to put some things on the record. At the outset I want to acknowledge the men, families, carers, advocates and organisations who shared deeply personal experiences with the committee.

Behind every statistic is a life lost, a family grieving and a community that is changed forever, and the report makes it clear that suicide among men remains one of the most pressing public health challenges that faces our community. Men account for the overwhelming majority of suicide deaths, yet many are less likely to seek help and less likely to engage with support services, and, too often, they fall through the cracks of a fragmented system. And, I think, what is particularly concerning is that the report does not simply identify challenges; it does identify a level of government failure.

The committee found that the ACT government failed to prioritise, failed to make meaningful progress, and failed to meet its own reporting obligations under the previous Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Regional Plan. I think that finding should concern every member of this Assembly. For years, governments have announced plans, strategies and frameworks but this inquiry heard repeated evidence of disconnected services, fragmented referral pathways, poor system integration and gaps in support for people experiencing distress before they reach crisis point.

Now, the report recognises that suicide prevention is not just about mental illness; it is about housing, it is about financial stress, family breakdown, social isolation, substance misuse and the ability to access support when it is needed. It requires leadership across government and accountability for outcomes.

That is why the Canberra Liberals have taken the view that if the government will not lead, we will. Earlier this year we announced our intention to introduce a Suicide Prevention Bill, because we believe suicide prevention requires more than aspiration; it requires accountability. Our legislation will seek to embed suicide prevention as a permanent responsibility of government-established stronger oversight, improved transparency, and to ensure that future governments cannot simply walk away from commitments without consequence.

The evidence presented at this inquiry demonstrates exactly why that reform is necessary. The report calls for better coordination, stronger aftercare, improved data collection, greater support for community organisations and a clearer focus on prevention. These are objectives that align closely with the reforms that we have been advocating for.

The Canberra Liberals support the intent of this report and many of its recommendations, but we also recognise that reports do not save lives. Recommendations alone do not save lives. Actions save lives.

The challenge for government is no longer identifying the problem. The committee has done that work. The challenge now is whether the government is prepared to accept responsibility and deliver meaningful reform.

For our part, we will continue to advocate for practical evidence-based measures that improve mental health outcomes and reduce suicide in our community—because every life matters. Every preventable death is one too many. And where the government fails to lead, we will certainly continue to lead from this side of chamber.

This report should not become another document that gathers dust on a shelf. The government has already been found to have failed on its previous commitments. The real test now is whether it acts or whether, once again, it takes a report on suicide prevention, notes it, and moves on.

### **Animals—kangaroos**

**MS LEE** (Kurrajong) (5.48): I rise to speak on this year's kangaroo cull, which commenced on Tuesday. Once again, Canberrans are being told that this cull is necessary and based on sound science. We must remember that this cull is not designed to reduce kangaroos on our roads or improve road safety. That has never been the government's justification, yet many members of the community firmly believe that the cull is about road safety.

That in itself highlights a lack of clear communication about the purpose, the process, the methods, and about the outcomes of the cull. There are growing concerns about the science behind the cull and the treatment of kangaroos, especially joeys. This government's approach relies heavily on how many kangaroos per hectare are present across our nature reserves. The assumption is that higher densities mean greater grazing pressure and therefore greater environmental harm.

We are told that kangaroos in the ACT are at higher densities than elsewhere in Australia because of a lack of predators. Therefore, culling is required to protect the eco-systems. The most comprehensive innovative scientific assessment we have, which was undertaken by the CSIRO, does not support that narrative. The CSIRO report, *Relationships between vegetation condition and kangaroo density in lowland grassy eco-systems of the northern Australian Capital Territory*, was commissioned to determine whether relationships exist between kangaroo density and vegetation condition in Canberra's lowland grasslands and grassy woodlands.

The CSIRO found that there is no strong consistent or predictive relationship between kangaroo density and vegetation condition. It found that relationships between kangaroo numbers and biodiversity are weak, inconsistent and often disappear entirely when outliers are removed. Critically, it concluded that it could not identify any upper density limit where damage occurs, nor any optimal density that should be targeted.

In fact, the report states, “Changes in vegetation structure and composition varied more between years than with kangaroo densities.” In other words, climate, rainfall and site-specific factors often matter more than kangaroo numbers.

Yet, year after year, this government continues to ignore the CSIRO findings. That raises some serious concerns. Are we looking at the full picture or only the parts that support this government’s policy?

In 2023, the Environment Directorate commissioned a review—the same agency that is responsible for implementing the kangaroo management program. When the same agency that designs the program also selects the review and defines the scope of the review, it is entirely reasonable for Canberrans to question whether that process is truly independent. For many Canberrans, it looks like asking someone to mark their own homework.

If the underlying population estimates are uncertain, then the entire justification for how animals are killed becomes uncertain as well, and yet these methods continue to be used as the basis for annual cull numbers without genuine independent examination.

Alongside these scientific concerns, there is another issue we cannot ignore and that is animal welfare. At the heart of this program is the killing of kangaroos, including the dependent young they leave behind. Current practices involve the clubbing to death of pouched joeys and the killings of joeys afoot. For many Canberrans, this is deeply confronting. Canberrans deeply value and cherish our native wildlife and expect that those animals are treated with respect and compassion.

At the last election, the Canberra Liberals put forward a clear path forward. Our policy was to immediately implement a moratorium on the kangaroo cull, to pause and to reassess the evidence and ensure that future decisions are based on the best available science by commissioning a truly independent review. That would be a review that is conducted at arm’s length from government and includes public submissions and hearings so that the full range of community views can be heard. And it must fully engage with the CSIRO findings without selective interpretation.

This is about ensuring that when we act, we do so on the basis of robust, credible and independent evidence. And it is about ensuring that our approach to wildlife management reflects both scientific integrity and the Canberra community’s values.

### **LGBTQIA+ affairs—Pride Month**

**MISS NUTTALL** (Brindabella) (5.52): As I am sure members will know, June is Pride Month, so I want to take the opportunity to speak in solidarity with our queer communities, particularly the trans community. I cannot speak to this issue with lived experience of a trans person; instead, I speak to it as a cis, or cis enough, woman—that is, a woman who was assigned female at birth. But, as a cis queer woman, I want to speak to this to make it clear that it is not only possible to simultaneously stand against misogyny and transphobia but, in fact, it is also necessary in the fight against both. This needs to be said because I think there is a worryingly common misconception that these are, in fact, in opposition to each other and that they at times contradict. I have spoken before in this place about bad-faith actors, in many cases shock jocks and far-right

politicians who weaponise these issues and, at times, take the language of a very real feminist struggle and deliberately use it to belittle and advocate against the rights of trans women.

Attacks like those on the Sex Discrimination Act by the Nationals MP Alison Penfold and those foreshadowed by the federal Liberal Party leader, Angus Taylor, harm all women. It is not just me saying that; it is also the Australian Sex Discrimination Commissioner, Dr Anna Cody, who described it as a retrograde step and feared it would harm the rights of all women, including those in the LGBTIQ+ community. But I understand that there are many who do not come at this issue from a bad place, even if they do come to conclusions which I believe to be misguided.

It is right to stand up for women's rights, whether it be in health, the workplace or society more broadly, but it is important we all make clear that this is entirely possible while also advocating for and defending the rights of trans people. Patriarchal structures have for years ignored women's health and issues like childbirth and pelvic pain in women, and it is important that we keep pointing out the continued prevalence of medical misogyny. And we must also point out that it is these very same systems that so often deny adequate care to trans people.

Trans men—those who were assigned female at birth but live today as men—very often deal with the very same systemic issues while also having their identities denied. This is why many now use terms like “people who menstruate”—not to deny the lived reality of women but to also include trans men and folks of other gender identities, particularly when they are navigating medical spaces. And, of course, trans women—women who were assigned male at birth—have to live with the realities of misogyny just like us cis women. Inclusive language also means understanding that they too are women and are part of the shared struggle under patriarchal structures.

On a similar note, it is right for women to have safe spaces in public bathrooms or changing rooms. This is also an issue that has been grievously misrepresented by some. Let's be clear: forcing some men, trans men, into female bathrooms and forcing some women, trans women, into men's bathrooms is what endangers people, and it actually tends to endanger trans folks first and foremost. One organisation that I think captures this all very well is the Not in our Name movement. They are a UK organisation that recently also founded a branch here in Australia. This is an organisation which exists to show solidarity with trans and intersex folks, but is also designed to bring all women with them. I want to quote directly from an open letter that they have penned. It states:

We do not shame or blame any woman who has felt anxious or uncertain about trans rights, given the media and certain politicians portraying our trans siblings as a threat. No matter your starting point, we welcome all women to join us in learning together and building an Australia where all are free, supported and safe from gender-based oppression.

I was actually nervous about this line to start with. The rest of the letter was as staunchly in favour of trans rights as they come, but I worry that this let transphobic people and transphobic behaviour off the hook. This letter was shared far and wide with the graciousness of a lot of trans folks. I think it speaks to the idea that all are welcome on the side of human rights and we are not going to miss the opportunity to find new allies, even where they are unlikely. It is this collective attitude of building bridges between

communities to fight for our collective liberation that has historically helped achieve wins for social justice, and it is in that collective spirit of solidarity that we will end gender based oppression and discrimination for all. I was really proud to sign Not in our Name's open letter to politicians. I would urge all of the women listening in to seriously think about doing the same. Thank you, and happy Pride.

### **Financial Management and Government Procurement Legislative Compliance—Select Committee—report**

**MR WERNER-GIBBINGS** (Brindabella) (5.57): I was sitting in the big chair yesterday and there was a bit going on at the time which meant I did not make any comments about the release of the report for the inquiry into financial management and government procurement legislative compliance, so I will make them now. After the Assembly had determined that this inquiry was necessary, I spent a little time musing whether the best way that I could describe for my fellow members the utter waste of the secretariat and members' time I feared this inquiry would be would be to stand here at this table in silence for my allotted time—completely performative and utterly pointless. But I am not going to do that. I have changed my mind.

A couple of mischiefs—to use a term beloved of the Clerk—have emerged over the journey: whether or not members of the Assembly and the general public are as fully informed by the February budget review as the Financial Management Act 1996 envisions they should be or could be, and whether the word “secure” in the Secure Local Jobs Code is about ensuring that jobs in the ACT are safe or is about creating jobs in the ACT. I will say for the *Hansard* what everyone has already said: this topic did not need the urgent scrutiny of a select committee. It was always a job for the public accounts committee, so in that respect it was a waste of the Assembly's scarce resources, particularly the committee's support routine. However, due to the good work of the chair and my fellow committee members, the industriousness of the secretariat, the receptiveness of the government and the doctrinaire zeal of Mr Cocks, the committee's report has given the government a fair bit to chew on.

Some recommendations in the report are more sensible and more feasible than others, in my opinion. Recommendation 6 is an excellent example of a sensible and feasible recommendation. It proposes that the government implement the necessary legislative changes so it can update its practice of reporting section 16B rollovers to ensure that the February budget review has more complete information on possible rollovers that is more timely, full and accurate. However, I think some of the findings are problematic. Findings should be offered as statements of facts, not expressions of prejudiced opinions. The language in some of the report's findings—“serious compliance concerns”, “limiting the ability to identify potential noncompliance”, “systemic failure”—is far more sensationalised than it needs to be and serves to undermine the points the findings seek to make.

As the second paragraph of the introduction makes clear, this inquiry was foisted upon the Assembly due solely to the concerns raised by Mr Cocks. Mr Cocks was, and I presume remains, convinced that his reading of the Financial Management Act is correct and that, based on his self-styled correct reading, the ACT government is deliberately breaching the act. I base this presumption on his comments yesterday to the effect that government actions the committee considered are clearly “not consistent

with the letter of the text within the Financial Management Act”. He seemed surprised that the committee did not find a breach of the act. I am surprised that he seemed surprised. He is not a lawyer or a judge. He has, respectfully but frankly, no professional expertise about what actions are or are not consistent with the letter of the text or the intent of the Financial Management Act. No-one on the committee is a judge either. And, while I was its only member with a law degree and felt I could make a persuasive case that the ACT government was more than compliant with the intent of the legislation, determining whether the legislation was breached was not within our expertise, our ability or our power. The same goes for any committee.

As it says in the ACT’s explanatory statement interpretation guide Mr Cocks so helpfully provided the committee, that decision belongs to judges. The guide quotes a 2009 ruling from the ACT Supreme Court Justice Gray that “the authoritative determination of the meaning of a statutory provision is an exercise of the judicial power”. Parliaments enact legislation; courts decide it. At no point in the chamber debate or during the inquiry did Mr Cocks cite legal advice that the ACT government was breaching the FMA. So I reckon throwing the Assembly’s scarce resources at a select inquiry based merely upon one member’s selective interpretation of the law sets a tiresome precedent. Arguments about any government’s interpretation of the law have to be tested and ruled upon in court, not by parliamentary committees. The thing is, Mr Cocks might be right, but, until he tests his reading of the act in court, it does not matter. I do not think Mr Cocks is right, but it does not matter what I think or what he thinks or what any committee finds. When it comes to legislative intent, it matters what courts decide.

### **National Disability Insurance Scheme**

**MS CLAY** (Ginninderra) (6.02): Today I want to tell the story of one of my constituents—someone my staff and I will be making ongoing efforts to help due to his untenable situation. This is a really personal story about Chris. I met Chris at Kippax on the weekend. He has already had his NDIS funding cut and he is worried about more cuts. He was out busking for a GoFundMe to try to raise the money that he needs. This is Chris’s story, but it is also a story shared by many others. It is emblematic of the suffering, struggle and despair that many people have experienced, and many more will experience should federal government’s proposed cuts to the NDIS go ahead.

Chris is legally blind, wheelchair-dependent, and experiences seizures. He was out and about on Saturday. We had a really good, long chat. He has a lot of views about Mark Butler and the NDIS. So does his mum. I have been chatting to his mum today because Chris is back in hospital. He has complex health challenges. They were made worse by a violent assault. After that public attack, in the privacy of his own home he was a victim of theft by unscrupulous individuals working as approved and vetted NDIS providers.

Chris needs NDIS support and he needs the NDIS system fixed. He does not need his funding reduced and he does not need to fear further cuts. Chris needs help with many of the activities of daily living, including taking medication, personal hygiene, managing seizures, dressing and food preparation. He grapples with chronic pain, depression, anxiety and insomnia. Many people would consider that managing all of this is a full-time job, even with professional help. Nonetheless, Chris has made

repeated efforts to obtain qualifications and employment. He wants to be an active member of the ACT community. He wants purpose in life. Chris's NDIS support was recently reduced. That has created unconscionable risks to his safety. It reduces his quality of life. It increases challenges in finding employment and fulfilment. It has caused soaring stress on his loved ones, who are stretched to the limit helping him out and advocating on his behalf, and it puts him at further risk.

Chris and his mum explained the problems with the NDIS really clearly to me, and the answer is not to enact abrupt, sweeping reductions in funding across the board. It is to fix the system and make sure those who need support are provided with it on an ongoing basis while the changes are made, in a way that respects them as human beings. This is what we need to do; it is what our federal government needs to do. Until that is done properly, our ACT government should do all they can to provide supports and to protect Chris and others like him.

Chris and his mum are trying to get help from the federal government. They are failing. They have tried repeatedly to get help through a senator. That has failed. Chris's mum was at Parliament House today. She is trying to see Mark Butler. She is failing. She was so distraught they escorted her off the premises today. Now all she can do is write a letter and hope Mark Butler reads it. Chris and his family are being seriously let down by the federal government's rush to make cuts to the NDIS—cuts that, if approved, will come into effect before alternative supports are in place in our territory.

As my colleague Laura Nuttall set out yesterday, the Greens will be doing all we can to advocate for immediate action for Chris and for everyone else who needs the NDIS. I expect there are concerned politicians, community workers and others doing the same around the country because of the pain these cuts are causing. It is being felt far and wide. I hope to make a difference for Chris and his mum. I will try my best.

I thank them for sharing their story with me and trusting me to tell it here today. It is not something I take lightly. We must not accept federal Labor's proposed changes to the NDIS because, if we do, we risk the lives and the wellbeing of so many people like Chris and including Chris. We must do better for the people who live in our community and have disabilities—the people we represent. The Greens commit themselves to that work.

## **FIFA Men's World Cup**

**MR CAIN** (Ginninderra) (6.06): I rise today to mark the commencement of the FIFA Men's World Cup tomorrow morning, Australian time, and to wish the Socceroos every success as they represent our nation on the world's biggest sporting stage. Few sporting events unite communities quite like a world cup, particularly soccer. For a month, families, friends and neighbours gather around televisions, with alarm clocks set for the early hours of the morning, and people from every background come together to support the green and gold.

Here in Canberra, football holds a special place in our community. Football is the largest participation sport in our region, with tens of thousands of Canberrans taking to the field every week. From Belconnen to Tuggeranong and from Gungahlin to Woden, local clubs are filled with young people chasing their dreams, alongside volunteers who

give their time to support them. Many of those young players will watch this tournament and imagine themselves one day wearing a Socceroos or Matildas jersey. The World Cup inspires the next generation like few events can.

That is why I encourage the ACT government to once again support public live sites and community screenings throughout the tournament, particularly in the city centre as we saw during the last World Cup. During the previous tournament, more than 4,000 supporters filled Civic Square just outside this Assembly. People came together to celebrate a common cause, bringing life, energy and business into the city. Those events create an incredible atmosphere, allow Canberrans to share in the excitement of the world game together and are great for the city's economy.

Yet, as at today, Canberra remains the only major city in Australia without a public live site announced for Socceroos' matches. Shame! A review of Football Australia's published live sites confirms that the ACT stands alone as the only state or territory with no live site—no effort to bring people together to support our national team on the world stage. Surely the budget situation is not so dire—I am being a bit ironic here—that Canberra cannot afford a community live site to celebrate the Socceroos and the world game. This must be a priority. I again call on the ACT government to seize this opportunity to bring Canberrans together, create community spirit and back our national team with the support they deserve.

Given the World Cup is being staged in the United States, Canada and Mexico, Australians and Canberrans can expect far more friendly viewing times than usual. The Socceroos have three huge group games ahead, starting this Sunday at 2 pm against Turkey, then against the USA next Saturday, before finishing against Paraguay on Friday, 26 June at 12 pm. Canberra is home to strong and proud multicultural communities, including Turkish, American and South American communities, making this a unique opportunity to bring people together to celebrate their heritage, support their national teams, and enjoy the world game together as one community.

As the tournament begins, I wish the Socceroos every success. May they make Australia proud, inspire the next generation of footballers, male and female, and give Canberrans plenty of reasons to celebrate our great country. I call on the ACT government to step up and provide some opportunities for our community to enjoy this as well. Go the Socceroos!

### **FIFA Men's World Cup**

**MS CHEYNE** (Ginninderra—Manager of Government Business, Attorney-General, Minister for Human Rights, Minister for City and Government Services and Minister for the Night-Time Economy) (6.10): I will not be long, but, so that we do not get into an awkward situation tomorrow where Mr Cain claims that his adjournment speech this evening encouraged the government to act, let me read a media release that is coming out tomorrow morning at 6 am—which I have approval to do, by the way.

**Mr Cain:** Tomorrow morning? Well, I am glad I have inspired you.

**MS CHEYNE:** No. That is the point.

**Mr Cain:** Straight onto it! That is so good to hear!

**MR SPEAKER:** Mr Cain! Ms Cheyne.

**MS CHEYNE:** Thanks, Mr Speaker. I am pleased to say that Canberrans are going to be encouraged to support local businesses while cheering on the Socceroos during the upcoming FIFA World Cup, with venues across the ACT, including a new live site at the University of Canberra, set to bring the community together for every match. There is going to be food and beverages for all three of the Socceroos stage games.

**Mr Cain:** Do I get any credit for this?

**MS CHEYNE:** No; you have no credit for this.

**Mr Cain:** Why not? Someone was listening, surely.

**MS CHEYNE:** Do you actually want to listen? The UC live site will allow the community to come together, celebrate and back Australia on football's biggest stage. Many local pubs, clubs and venues will also be showing the matches and creating a great community atmosphere to support the Socceroos and enjoy the tournament. It is a great opportunity to back local businesses while experiencing the excitement of the World Cup. Venues across the ACT can also take advantage of declared special events. These automatically extend liquor licence trading hours when there is an important event on for Canberrans. The opening and closing ceremonies of the World Cup have been declared special events, with hours extended until 2 am on Saturday, 13 June, and 2 am on Tuesday, 21 July. Together, the UC live site and the extended trading hours for venues across the city will allow fans to connect and celebrate together while also supporting the local economy. As Mr Cain said, but I do not think he mentioned all the times, the Socceroos are playing their group stage games on 14 June at 2 pm, 20 June at 5 am, and 26 June at midday, local time.

We are encouraging Canberrans to get out. These are fantastic opportunities for Canberrans to get together with family, friends and other fans. I certainly was in Civic Square at the live site that the ACT government ran back in 2022. It was terrific and the atmosphere was great. I know it will be just as great at the UC. These are the big moments that bring people together. I hope we also see many venues take advantage of the extended trading hours and make the most of increased demand.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

**The Assembly adjourned at 6.13 pm.**