



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

**DAILY HANSARD**

Edited proof transcript

12 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 **Friday, 3 July 2026**

**Friday, 12 June 2026**

Petitions:	
School curriculum—Armenian, Assyrian and Greek genocide—petitions 13-26 and 62-26 .....	2299
Planning—Woden—CIT Plaza—petitions 24-26 and 61-26 .....	2299
GIO Stadium—petitions 35-26 and 60-26.....	2300
Kaleen community hall—petitions 37-26 and 63-26 .....	2301
Canberra Institute of Technology—senior fitness programs— petition 59-26 .....	2301
Motion to take note of petitions:	
School curriculum—Armenian, Assyrian and Greek genocide—petitions 13-26 and 62-26 .....	2302
Kaleen community hall—petitions 37-26 and 63-26 .....	2302
Visitor .....	2303
Motion to take note of petitions:	
School curriculum—Armenian, Assyrian and Greek genocide—petitions 13-26 and 62-26 .....	2304
GIO Stadium—petitions 35-26 and 60-26.....	2304
School curriculum—Armenian, Assyrian and Greek genocide—petitions 13-26 and 62-26 .....	2304
Kaleen community hall—petitions 37-26 and 63-26 .....	2304
Planning—Woden—CIT Plaza—petitions 24-26 and 61-26 .....	2306
School curriculum—Armenian, Assyrian and Greek Genocide—petitions 13-26 and 62-26 .....	2306
Planning—Woden—CIT Plaza—petitions 24-26 and 61-26 .....	2307
Budget—Wellbeing Framework (Ministerial statement) .....	2308
Budget—Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs; Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water; Disability, Carers and Community Services; Seniors and Veterans (Ministerial statement) .....	2311
Budget—Business, Arts and Creative Industries, Children, Youth and Families, Multicultural Affairs, and Skills, Training and Industrial Relations (Ministerial statement) .....	2315
Visitor .....	2320
Clerk of the Assembly—Mr Tom Duncan (Motion of thanks) .....	2320
Budget—Police, Fire and Emergency Services; Women; Prevention of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence; and Corrections (Ministerial statement) .....	2333
Orders of the day—discharge .....	2338
Standing Committees (Membership).....	2338
Budget management system—order to table documents .....	2348
Legal Affairs—Standing Committee .....	2351
Integrity Commission and Statutory Office Holders—Standing Committee .....	2351
Environment and Planning—Standing Committee .....	2352
Ministerial Arrangements .....	2352
Questions without notice:	
City Police Station—condition .....	2352
Budget—revenue .....	2353
Macquarie swimming pool—site lease.....	2354
Woods Reserve campground—domestic animals .....	2356
ACT Policing—professional standards investigations .....	2356

Access Canberra—Woden shopfront .....	2357
Budget—frontline services .....	2358
Thriving Kids—federal government funding .....	2359
Levies and taxation—rates .....	2360
Parking—car parking costs.....	2361
Bulk-billing—general practice clinics.....	2362
Sports grounds—facilities .....	2363
Infrastructure—government infrastructure projects .....	2364
Roads—Athllon Drive duplication.....	2365
Housing affordability—first home buyers.....	2367
Light rail—stage 2B .....	2368
Supplementary answers to questions without notice:	
Thriving Kids—federal government funding .....	2369
Woods Reserve campgrounds—pets exclusion.....	2369
Roads—Athllon Drive duplication.....	2370
Parking—parking fees .....	2370
Standing Committees (Membership).....	2370
Leave of absence .....	2370
Road Transport (Alcohol and Drugs) Amendment Bill 2026 .....	2370
Crime—youth crime .....	2374
Standing orders—suspension .....	2394
Urban Forest and Planning Legislation Amendment Bill 2026 .....	2394
Transport and City Services—Standing Committee .....	2399
Environment and Planning—Standing Committee .....	2399
Appropriation Bill 2026-2027 .....	2400
Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill 2026-2027 .....	2414
Libraries ACT—opening hours .....	2414
Statements by members:	
Sport and recreation—sportsgrounds roundtable .....	2432
Nepalese community—Mount Everest Day .....	2433
Clerk of the Assembly—Mr Tom Duncan .....	2433
Radford College—community art show.....	2433
Adjournment:	
Service veterans—commemoration.....	2434

**Friday, 12 June 2026**

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

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

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

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

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

## **Petitions**

*The following petitions were lodged for presentation:*

### **School curriculum—Armenian, Assyrian and Greek genocide—petitions 13-26 and 62-26**

*By Mr Braddock, from 152 and 138 residents respectively:*

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

The following residents of the ACT draw the attention of the Assembly to the genocide committed against the Armenian, Assyrian and Greek peoples by the Ottoman Empire between 1915 and 1923. During this period, an estimated two million people were killed and hundreds of thousands were forcibly displaced.

Your petitioners, therefore, request the Assembly to call on the ACT Government to amend the ACT primary and secondary school World War I curriculum to include education on the systematic mass killings and deportations of the Armenian, Assyrian and Greek communities under the Ottoman Empire.

### **Planning—Woden—CIT Plaza—petitions 24-26 and 61-26**

*By Ms Carrick, from 219 and 361 residents respectively:*

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

The following residents of the ACT draw the attention of the Assembly their concerns about the ACT Government's plan to allow general traffic to move through the West (CIT) Plaza in the Woden Town Centre.

The CIT Plaza is a new public space in the core of Woden next to the new CIT

campus. It has been designed as a destination, a place where people naturally gather, spend time, and connect with one another. It is intended to host markets, events, and social activities that strengthen local identity, belonging, and community life. Allowing traffic to move through, and park in this space will seriously degrade its value.

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

- Continue the current restriction on traffic moving through the CIT Plaza
- Implement flexible access control measures, such as retractable bollards, to allow vehicle access to the plaza when necessary to support events and for emergency response.
- Relocate the accessible parking spaces from the CIT Plaza to a suitable location nearby, such as the decommissioned bus stop on Bowes Street, next to the Cosmopolitan Building.

*Pursuant to standing order 99A, the petitions, having at least 500 signatories, was referred to the Standing Committee on Environment and Planning.*

### **GIO Stadium—petitions 35-26 and 60-26**

*By Mr Cain, from 488 and 11 residents respectively:*

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

The following residents of the ACT draw the attention of the Assembly to the deteriorating condition of GIO Stadium, which no longer meets modern standards for safety, accessibility, or spectator experience.

The stadium's ageing infrastructure, harsh winter conditions, and limited accessible facilities make attendance difficult for families, older Canberrans, people with disabilities, and visiting supporters. Canberra is now the only Australian capital without a modern, purpose-built rectangular stadium, and the current venue no longer reflects the professionalism of the Canberra Raiders and ACT Brumbies or the expectations of the broader sporting community. Recent safety incidents, including damage to the coaches box during a nationally broadcast match, have highlighted the urgency of addressing long-term infrastructure issues. The condition of the stadium discourages attendance, reduces opportunities for social connection, and limits Canberra's ability to host major sporting and entertainment events, resulting in lost economic and tourism opportunities for the ACT.

Your petitioners therefore request the Assembly to call on the ACT Government to acknowledge the current condition of GIO Stadium and develop a clear, publicly communicated plan for its future. This plan should include options for major upgrades or the development of a modern, purpose-built rectangular stadium that meets contemporary standards for safety, accessibility, and community use. Your petitioners further request that the Assembly consider the economic, social, and community benefits of improved sporting infrastructure, including job creation, increased event capacity, enhanced tourism, and strengthened community wellbeing through greater participation in sport and live events.

## **Kaleen community hall—petitions 37-26 and 63-26**

*By Mr Braddock, from 287 and 212 residents respectively:*

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

The following residents of the ACT draw the attention of the Assembly to the car park at Kaleen Community Hall has fallen into significant disrepair.

It is frequently riddled with potholes, and during periods of heavy rainfall it floods, creating a serious safety risk for all who use it. Residents have been advocating to the Minister for City and Government Services since 2023 for a permanent solution to these issues. Funding was promised in the 2023–24 Budget to deliver a lasting fix; however, this commitment has yet to be fulfilled.

It should also be noted that this issue is not limited to the hall carpark. There is significant damage to the surrounding footpaths, which also poses a serious safety risk to the community and should be addressed as a matter of urgency.

Your petitioners, therefore, request the Assembly to Call on the ACT Government to: Commit to the assessment, design and funding of a permanent solution in the upcoming 2026/27 ACT budget to the various maintenance issues at Kaleen Community Hall to ensure the safety of all users.

## **Canberra Institute of Technology—senior fitness programs—petition 59-26**

*By Mr Cain, from 8 residents:*

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

The following residents of the ACT draw the attention of the Assembly to the long-standing senior fitness programs at CIT Bruce have been cut back despite strong demand, and have supported the health, rehabilitation and social wellbeing of hundreds of older Canberrans for over a decade; that many classes are already full, with waiting lists; that recent changes have reduced classes, removed an entire day of access, cut higher-level and yoga sessions, and eliminated weekend gym access; that participants include seniors managing chronic illness and recovering from significant medical events; that these programs provide proven preventative health and social benefits that reduce isolation and support healthy ageing, at a time when the ACT Government is promoting healthy ageing; that there are few, if any, realistic and affordable alternatives in Canberra offering the same level of appropriate, higher-intensity exercise in a safe group setting for older people; and that these changes will force many older Canberrans to lose a vital part of their weekly health and social routine.

Your petitioners, therefore, request the Assembly call on the ACT Government to immediately reverse the cuts, restore all classes and gym access, provide proper consultation, and guarantee long-term funding for senior fitness programs.

*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.

### **School curriculum—Armenian, Assyrian and Greek genocide—petitions 13-26 and 62-26**

### **Kaleen community hall—petitions 37-26 and 63-26**

**MR BRADDOCK** (Yerrabi) (10.03): I rise to speak to two petitions that I have sponsored that have been tabled today. The first concerns the condition of the Kaleen community hall car park and surrounding footpaths. This petition has been signed not just by hundreds of Kaleen residents, but by many across the ACT who are frustrated by the ongoing deterioration of an important community asset. The car park has fallen into significant disrepair, with potholes and regular flooding during periods of heavy rainfall, creating safety risks for community members and visitors.

Residents have been raising these concerns since 2023, and they have consistently advocated for a permanent solution. Funding was promised in the 2023-24 budget to address these issues, yet the works remain outstanding. While this may appear to be a small local issue, it matters greatly to the people who use this facility. Community halls are places where people gather, connect and support one another. They should be safe and accessible for everyone.

The concerns extend beyond the car park itself. Damage to the surrounding footpaths creates additional risk for pedestrians, including older Canberrans, people with a disability and parents with prams. Petitioners are simply asking the government to deliver on a commitment that has already been made, and ensure that the infrastructure is safe, accessible and fit-for-purpose. Accordingly, petitioners request that the Assembly call on the ACT government to commit to the assessment, design and funding of a permanent solution to these maintenance issues in the 2026-27 budget.

I would like to thank the principal petitioner, Dimitri, for his hard work and dedication in driving this campaign and advocating for the Kaleen community.

The second petition I am tabling today calls for the genocide of the Armenian, Assyrian and Greek peoples to be included in the ACT primary and secondary school curriculum. This petition is the result of years of tireless advocacy by members of these communities. They have worked diligently to raise awareness, engage with the government and build support for this important cause.

What they are asking for is simple—that these atrocities are remembered and taught to future generations. Education is one of the most powerful tools we have to ensure that the lessons of history are not forgotten. At a time when hatred, racism and intolerance continue to emerge in our communities, the case for teaching these histories is stronger, now more than ever.

Importantly, this is not unprecedented. New South Wales has already committed to teaching about these genocides in schools from 2027. The ACT has an opportunity to show similar leadership and ensure that students receive a more complete understanding of history.

The Greens are proud to support this petition and the communities behind it. We hope the Assembly will give serious consideration to this request and take steps to include information on these genocides in the ACT curriculum.

More broadly, this petition reflects a longstanding call from the Armenian, Assyrian and Greek communities for formal recognition of this genocide. Many members of this Assembly have expressed support in principle for this recognition. Now is the time to move beyond an in-principle position and take tangible steps towards making that a reality.

I call on the ACT government, in its response to this petition, to utilise the opportunity to recognise the genocide and, in doing so, help to heal the wound that lives on in the Armenian, Assyrian and Greek communities who reside right here in the ACT.

Finally, I want to acknowledge the many advocates who have dedicated years of their lives to this cause. Advocacy is rarely easy, and meaningful change is often hard-won. Thank you for your persistence, commitment and determination. In particular, I want to recognise Angie, who joins us in the gallery today. She has been instrumental not only in driving this petition, but also in advocating across all levels of government for recognition of this genocide. Angie, your countless hours of work, personal sacrifices and unwavering commitment have not gone unnoticed. On behalf of everyone who has supported this effort, thank you for all you have done, and may you continue to do so.

I commend both petitions to the Assembly. Mr Speaker, I seek leave to table two images relating to the Kaleen community hall car park.

Leave granted.

**MR BRADDOCK:** I present the following paper:

Kaleen Community Hall car park condition—Copy of photos (x2).

Debate interrupted.

## **Visitor**

**MR SPEAKER:** Before I call the next speaker, I would like to acknowledge the presence in the gallery of Mary Porter, a former member. Welcome, Mary, to the proceedings today.

## **Petitions**

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

Debate resumed.

**School curriculum—Armenian, Assyrian and Greek genocide—petitions 13-26 and 62-26**

**MS TOUGH** (Brindabella) (10.07): I, too, rise to lend my support to the petition lodged by Mr Braddock, and thank him for his work in bringing the petition to the Assembly. I extend thanks to Angie and so many other advocates who have worked tirelessly over years for recognition. They have had countless hours of meetings with so many people, and they have talked to the community about the genocide and what happened. I am really proud to stand up and talk about this petition today.

The petition is pretty simple. It calls for recognition and inclusion in the school curriculum, when talking about World War I events, around what happened with the genocide by the Ottoman Empire of Armenian, Greek and Assyrian communities, and Australia's involvement from a humanitarian perspective. While Australia does not formally recognise these events as a genocide at a national level, there has been work across many states to do so, and more work continues.

During the First World War, when these events took place, Australians serving abroad were some of the first witnesses of the genocide. They wrote home about what was going on, and Australians proudly contributed to the humanitarian efforts. Australians raised money; they sent clothes, they sent blankets and they opened orphanages to support the children who had been orphaned. There were so many people who had been displaced by the genocide.

From the initial events of 24 April 1915, large numbers of Armenian, Greek and Assyrian civilians living in the Ottoman Empire were subjected to forced relocations, violence, deprivation and loss of life. Estimates suggest that more than two million people died. These figures reflect the devastating human toll on communities that have existed in the region for centuries.

From talking to Angie this morning, I know this has had ongoing effects on families who were displaced at that time, who do not have that connection to where their family is from, and who maybe do not realise what happened to their family. It has an ongoing effect for generations to come. Recognising that it happened, and teaching it to our future generations, is an important part of people feeling like they belong in our community and have recognition. Thank you, Angie, and everyone.

I wanted to lend my support to this petition. New South Wales, from next year, will be teaching it, as part of their school curriculum, under the idea of Australia's civic action and humanitarian response during World War I. I think that is a really great place for it to fit, because we took part in the broader context of the global conflict in World War I. Australia played a really important role in helping afterwards, but we need to acknowledge that the genocide happened and teach people about it into the future. I commend the petition to the Assembly.

**GIO Stadium—petitions 35-26 and 60-26**  
**School curriculum—Armenian, Assyrian and Greek genocide—petitions 13-26 and 62-26**  
**Kaleen community hall—petitions 37-26 and 63-26**

**MR CAIN** (Ginninderra) (10.10): I am in an unenviable position of having four petitions that I have had quite intimate involvement with. Fortunately, I have one that will be the main topic of my time today. With respect to the state of the GIO Stadium, is there any more newsworthy item in our city at the moment? I am not quite sure that there is. It has been the case for a long time—the state of the GIO Stadium.

I preface my comments, leading in to talking about this petition, and an out-of-order petition which I will also seek to table, by saying that the capital city of Australia deserves a world-class stadium. I think that is axiomatic. I think everyone would say, “Yes, of course it does.” The capital city of Australia deserves a world-class stadium. That is really at the heart of the petition that I have sponsored from Mr Matthew Ward. I want to thank Mr Ward for his passion to see a stadium that Canberrans can be proud of and that can attract world-class sporting events—many more than we do at the moment. In fact, some do not come to Canberra because of the state of the stadium.

We have the opportunity for concerts. We have the opportunity for conventions. It has been reported that Christchurch has a relatively brand-new stadium, earthquake proof—I do not know that we need that here—for under \$600 million, with a roof, that is slightly bigger, capacity-wise, than the current stadium in our city.

This has been a long-running saga. As members will know, the petition draws attention to the ageing infrastructure, our winter conditions, of course, and the limited accessibility, particularly for families and older Canberrans. We want visitors to come here and think, “Wow, what a stadium.” Unfortunately, that is not quite the impression that they leave with.

I have been very happy to sponsor the petition. I know he got 488 online signatures. I believe there are—I saw the number the other day—about 19 hard-copy petitions, which takes it over the threshold for committee consideration. I trust that the committee will be very serious in what it considers.

I hope that the committee takes note as well that Mr Ward, prior to the commencement of the Assembly petition, had started a Change.org petition that reached 4,711 signatures. His own choice of title for this petition is “Fix or replace GIO Stadium now. It’s unsafe, outdated and embarrassing for the capital”. That is his petition; it is not the one that I had direct involvement with—4,711 signatures. I seek leave to table this out-of-order petition.

Leave granted.

**MR CAIN:** I present the following paper:

Petition which does not conform with the standing orders—GIO Stadium—  
Refurbishment—Mr Cain (4,711 signatures).

I hope that the relevant standing committee can seriously consider the matter. Basically, the petition that I sponsored on the stadium calls for the government to acknowledge that it is just not good enough. I know the government has announced some dollars for repairs and upgrades to GIO. I think there is a need for a thorough plan for the future

of our city to have a world-class stadium.

I want to speak about Mr Braddock's petition, which recognises the Armenian, Greek and Assyrian genocide over 100 years ago. I have a deep, long-lasting and, I hope, continuing involvement. Thank you, Angie, and the Armenian National Committee for bringing this to our attention, and to the community's attention. History is history. Our students should be taught history. This is a very sad part of our history which must be brought to our students' attention.

On the Kaleen community hall car park, thank you, Dimitri. Again, keep going.

**Planning—Woden—CIT Plaza—petitions 24-26 and 61-26  
School curriculum—Armenian, Assyrian and Greek Genocide—petitions  
13-26 and 62-26**

**MS CARRICK** (Murrumbidgee) (10.16): Today I want to speak about why the CIT West Plaza must remain a pedestrian space, free from through traffic and parking, and why getting this decision right matters for the future of Woden. At its heart, this is about the kind of city we are building. The CIT West Plaza sits right in the core of Woden. It connects the CIT campus to the town square, the transport interchange and the surrounding community. It was designed as a destination—a place for people to gather, to spend time, and to participate in markets, events and student life. It was not designed to be a road.

If we allow general traffic to move through this space, even at low speeds, we fundamentally change how it functions. The presence of vehicles introduces both real and perceived safety risks. It interrupts walking routes. It discourages people from lingering, from sitting and from using the space as their own. A plaza cannot thrive if it feels like a shortcut for cars. We should step back and recognise a broader principle. In modern city planning, we do not push cars into the core of our town centres; we do the opposite: we push them out. We direct through traffic onto arterial roads where it can move more efficiently and safely. And we protect the heart of our centres as places for people—places that prioritise walking, accessibility, social interaction and economic activity. That is how successful town centres work. That is how you create vibrancy and life.

Importantly, this is not about removing something essential. There has never been a traffic thoroughfare through this location before. Over the past several years, traffic in Woden adapted during construction of the bus interchange, with vehicles using surrounding roads and the broader network functioning as it should. This is not a necessary road; it is a choice, and we should choose people.

I want to address accessibility directly because it is critical that we get this right, because the proposal is for four accessible parks in the public space. Accessible parking must be provided. People with disability must be able to access the CIT and the town centre conveniently and safely. That is absolutely essential. But placing accessible parking spaces in the middle of the plaza is not the only way to achieve that and it is not the best way. We can provide high-quality, convenient, accessible parking in nearby locations: on surrounding streets like Bowes Street, near drop-off points and close to key entrances. These locations can deliver genuine accessibility while preserving the

plaza as a safe, open and welcoming space. Good design does both: it supports accessibility and protects the integrity of public space.

We also have practical solutions to maintain flexibility. Retractable bollards or similar access controls can allow vehicles to enter the plaza when needed for events, servicing or emergency response, without turning it into a through road. That is a balanced, sensible approach. It keeps the space functional while ensuring its primary purpose remains intact. If we want this space to succeed, we must focus on what it was always meant to be: a people-focused, vibrant public space—a space where students hold events and performances, where markets and food stalls draw people in, where the community gathers, day and night, but none of this will happen if the space feels dominated by cars.

In closing, the CIT West Plaza should remain closed to general traffic and onsite parking, with accessible parking provided in convenient nearby locations. There needs to be a clear focus on making this space the vibrant civic heart it was designed to be.

I will quickly mention that I recognise the genocide in Armenia in World War I and express my appreciation for the tireless advocacy of Angie and the Armenian community in raising awareness in the community of this tragedy.

### **Planning—Woden—CIT Plaza—petitions 24-26 and 61-26**

**MR STEEL** (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage and Minister for Transport) (10.20): I rise to speak in relation to the petition tabled by Ms Carrick regarding the Bowes-Bradley shared zone at the CIT Woden West Plaza. The Bowes-Bradley connection has been designed as a shared zone, which means that pedestrians and people using mobility aids have priority and vehicles are permitted only at very low speeds as guests in the space. Vehicles are allowed through the CIT campus precinct to provide local access, including drop-off and pick-up services and access to nearby buildings and businesses. There are also two accessible parking spaces within the Bowes-Bradley shared zone and a further five accessible parking spaces on Bradley Street, outside the southern side of CIT Woden.

Comprehensive traffic modelling was undertaken during the planning for the Bowes-Bradley connection which estimated that approximately 80 to 100 vehicles will use the shared zone during weekday periods, with no more than around 1,000 vehicles per day overall. On this basis, the connection has been classified as a local access street, supporting its design as a calm, pedestrian-prioritised space.

From 5 July 2021 to 20 September 2021, Major Projects Canberra, as iCBR was known then, consulted with the community about the planned Bowes-Bradley shared zone connection as part of the early design stages of the CIT Woden Campus and Woden interchange project. The community were invited to have their say on topics like safety, sustainability and accessibility, and the community were asked how they might use the Bowes-Bradley connection and what they wanted to see in the zone. The results showed a high degree of support for the Bowes-Bradley connection. We heard that the community wanted to see safe drop-off and pick-up for people coming from private vehicles enabled by the connection, as well as the need for shade, seating and gardens.

These comments provided us with valuable insights into people's future use of the area, particularly for drop-off and pick-up purposes, elderly relatives, children catching school buses, and those carrying heavy groceries.

The listening report and the detailed results were shared with the project contractors to inform design decisions, including subsequent development applications, which also went through a consultation process and were approved for the project, with the construction completed on the project in July 2025. With the Woden interchange now complete, the Bowes and Bradley Street local access shared zone is now expected to open to traffic by the end of July 2026, once final minor roadworks are completed.

I appreciate the request is now being made by some members of the community to not open the shared zone that was designed and built as part of the project, but the government strongly believes that the Bowes-Bradley shared zone remains critical for accessibility, including for people with a disability and older people with mobility issues, with pick-up and drop-off points part of the shared zone close to the Westfield entrance, the CIT campus, and now the Woden interchange.

It is also a necessary part of broader pedestrianisation of the former roadways of the old transport interchange, including the transformation of the old interchange into a new east-west pedestrian boulevard, with good passive surveillance to promote safety and vehicle access for local businesses. This does not preclude the shared zone being temporarily closed for events such as markets in the future, should event organisers engage with the ACT government. To support safety, particularly for people with disabilities, the shared zone includes a mandatory 10-kilometre-per-hour speed limit, pedestrian priority surface treatments, a curved alignment to slow vehicles and landscaping and street furniture that reinforce a pedestrian-focused environment.

These measures align with the ACT government best practice design guidance for shared zones, where cars are intended to move cautiously and yield to pedestrians at all times. Shared zones are designed so that cars are not the dominant users, and the Bowes-Bradley connection has been carefully planned to reflect that principle. As the area becomes fully operational for both vehicles and pedestrians by the end of July, it will be closely monitored to ensure it operates as intended and continues to provide a safe and accessible environment for all users.

I provided this update now because this change will come into effect in July, and, given the reporting back on this petition will come sometime after that, I am providing an interim government response now. Obviously, we will provide a formal government response in the future, but I need to be clear that our government will always prioritise accessibility for people in our community, and this new Bowes-Bradley connection will provide accessibility for people with a disability and for older people in our community.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **Budget—Wellbeing Framework Ministerial statement**

**MR BARR** (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism and Trade) (10.24): Six years ago, I committed the government

to putting wellbeing at the centre of our approach to governing. Following extensive consultation with the community, we developed the ACT Wellbeing Framework, which is a framework grounded in what Canberrans told us matters most to their quality of life. The framework comprises 12 domains surrounding a central focus of personal wellbeing, reflecting the many interconnected factors that shape how people live, work and thrive. This framework is not abstract; it is a practical tool that helps government make better, more informed decisions. It ensures that more people in our community have the opportunity to live lives that are safe, meaningful and of value both personally and collectively.

This approach recognises that wellbeing is shaped not only by economic growth but also by social, environmental and community factors. It reflects a commitment to improving quality of life across all aspects of how people experience Canberra as a place to live. When we began this journey, only a handful of governments around the world—including New Zealand, Wales and Scotland—were taking this approach. Since then, the ACT has forged its own path, tailoring our efforts to our territory's unique context. In doing so, we have become recognised internationally as a leader in wellbeing based policymaking.

For people to lead lives of value, they must do so in an environment—both natural and built—that supports rather than diminishes their wellbeing. Equally, they must be supported by institutions that treat them with fairness, dignity and respect. Against all of these measures, the ACT remains one of the most liveable places in the world. As a government and a parliament, we have a responsibility to ensure that this liveability is shared and that our investments deliberately improve outcomes for those experiencing disadvantage and marginalisation.

A wellbeing approach requires us to look beyond the immediate. It compels us to consider long-term impacts of decisions on individuals, communities and future generations. Over the past six years, this approach has proven its value. We have faced unprecedented challenges this decade, including bushfires, a global pandemic, ongoing cost-of-living pressures, and various wars around the world. Despite this, our territory economy has remained resilient, and this resilience is not accidental; it reflects deliberate, forward-looking choices grounded in a broader understanding of wellbeing.

Recent data shows gradual but meaningful improvements in wellbeing across the territory, including a reduction in the proportion of residents experiencing low wellbeing, and stable confidence in the future. At the same time, global economic uncertainty, including rising interest rates and cost pressures, is expected to place renewed strain on households and reinforce the need for sustained action on affordability and financial security. We recognise the unique vulnerabilities of the territory economy, our strong ties to the commonwealth and our exposure to external economic pressures, and these realities make it even more important that our decisions are strategic, evidence based and focused on long-term outcomes.

The Wellbeing Framework is now embedded in the core machinery of government decision-making, including the work of the Expenditure Review Committee. Through wellbeing budgeting, the ERC does not simply assess proposals on cost or short-term outputs; it considers how investment decisions impact wellbeing across 12 domains—who benefits, who may be adversely affected, and how these trade-offs are managed.

A central tool in this process is the Wellbeing Impact Assessment. This assessment is now a standard requirement for cabinet submissions and is incorporated into the business case template for budget proposals. It ensures that deliberations are informed by a structured assessment of how policies and investments affect people's lives, including distributional impacts and long-term consequences.

This strengthens decision-making in three key ways. First, it ensures that funding is directed toward initiatives that deliver the greatest overall benefit to the community, particularly for those most in need. Second, it makes the trade-offs explicit, improving transparency and accountability in how public resources are allocated. Third, it promotes more integrated, cross-government solutions by highlighting how outcomes in one domain—for example, housing—affect others, including health, education and employment. This is reflected in the budget itself, where investments in areas such as housing, health and early childhood are designed to deliver benefits across multiple wellbeing domains at once.

We are also encouraging the use of the Wellbeing Impact Assessment much earlier in the policy development process so that wellbeing considerations shape proposals from the outset rather than being added later. Over time, this approach is building a stronger evidence base and enabling more targeted, effective and equitable investment decisions.

This work is supported by a growing wellbeing ecosystem across government. This includes wellbeing budgeting being embedded in decision-making processes, stronger cross-government coordination to deliver integrated outcomes, investment in data and evidence infrastructure, and ongoing engagement with the community and stakeholders. Importantly, the ecosystem is underpinned by robust data. Since 2019, the Living Well in the ACT Region survey has provided valuable insights into the lived experience of our community. It shows improvements in wellbeing alongside strong social cohesion and increasing community participation.

In addition, the Life Course Data Initiative, supported by a partnership with the Australian National University, is linking ACT and commonwealth data to better understand pathways into and out of disadvantage. This evidence directly informs priorities and budget decisions and allows us to invest where it will make the most difference. Through this process, we have identified six priority areas that guide our current budget deliberations. They are: addressing marginalisation and disadvantage, children's early years, the cost of living, housing, mental and physical health, and women. These priorities reflect where action can have the greatest impact on overall wellbeing, both in the short term and over the longer term. As members would expect, these priorities are deeply interconnected. Progress in one area often drives improvements in others. This underscores the importance of coordinated action and shared accountability across government.

As I have touched upon, investment in housing not only improves living conditions but also contributes to better health outcomes, stronger educational attainment and enhanced social connection. Similarly, investment in the early years supports lifelong health, learning and participation outcomes and is one of the most effective ways to reduce disadvantage over time.

The challenges we face are complex and cannot be solved by individual agencies

working in isolation. A wellbeing approach encourages us to think and act as one system that is more adaptive, more collaborative and more focused on outcomes. It also requires us to continue strengthening our evidence base and our ability to measure impact so that decisions are increasingly informed by what works. A wellbeing approach is ultimately about stewardship. It is about making decisions today that improve lives tomorrow. This year's budget reflects this stewardship through a balance of immediate support and long-term investment, including significant funding across health, housing, education and community support that will shape outcomes over many years.

My colleagues and I look forward to continuing to bring wellbeing focused initiatives before the Assembly as we build on the strong foundations that have been established over the past six years, because what we do now matters, not just for today but for generations to come.

I present the following paper:

Wellbeing Framework—Ministerial statement, 12 June 2026.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

**MS VASSAROTTI** (Kurrajong) (10.34): The Wellbeing Framework is an essential tool for progressive jurisdictions. I agree with the Chief Minister that it should ensure the ACT government makes social, environmental and community factors central to decision-making. This approach was championed by the ACT Greens prior to its introduction in 2020. When it was introduced, it showed vision and created great opportunity for the territory. I am afraid that this vision does not always bear out in reality. Rather than being core to policy design, it can be an afterthought—a tick-and-flick part of the cabinet process. If it were central, we would be close to eradicating homelessness. We would lead the country in preventative health. We would lead the country in early childhood care and educational attainment.

The reality is that economic factors, which are often short term, often take precedence. That precedence results in rising housing waiting lists, increased demands for acute care, and a school system which does not have the right systems and funding in place to deliver the best possible outcomes for young Canberrans. It seems that reward and recognition in the public service continues to privilege economic rather than wellbeing factors. The assessment of the Wellbeing Framework often comes too late in the policy-making process when it needs to be embedded in its core. Until this changes, the Wellbeing Framework is unlikely to make the impact it should and could. We would be really glad to work with the Chief Minister to see how we can make the vision of a wellbeing city a true reality.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

**Budget—Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs; Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water; Disability, Carers and Community Services; Seniors and Veterans**

**Ministerial statement**

**MS ORR** (Yerrabi—Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water, Minister for Disability, Carers and Community Services and Minister for Seniors and Veterans) (10.36): I rise today to inform the Assembly on some of the government's 2026-27 budget investments across my portfolios. The 2026-27 budget continues to affirm the ACT government's proven and long-term commitment to building a more inclusive, accessible and equitable community for everyone. This budget supports and expands the capacity of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body to deliver core functions and meet growing engagement expectations across the ACT.

The ACT government is also providing additional support to the Elected Body to strengthen oversight of justice system reforms to implement the Jumbunna review. I acknowledge our partnership with the Elected Body and recognise their ongoing commitment to representing the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community in the ACT. This increase in funding further supports and strengthens the Elected Body, and I thank them for their engagement throughout the budget process. In addition to providing increased funding to the Elected Body, the ACT government is also providing more than \$750,000 over two years to advance the ACT government's commitment to the Uluru Statement from the Heart, through investing in culturally relevant truth-telling for our Canberra community.

As all members of this place will know, work under the disability portfolio is being delivered in a complex and evolving environment alongside major national reforms to disability policy and services. \$63.4 million over five years has been committed to Thriving Kids in the ACT, comprising \$37.3 million from the ACT government and \$26.1 million from the commonwealth government. This budget also provides funding to support and sustain key ACT disability organisations, including advocacy organisations, as governments across Australia build up foundational supports outside the NDIS. This support is essential to ensure the voices and perspectives of people with disability, along with their families, carers and kin, continue to be heard, and that they remain supported throughout this period of significant change.

To support an inclusive community for LGBTIQ+ Canberrans, the government is investing \$894,000 to fund gender navigation services and advocacy, targeted support for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTIQ+ Advisory Group, and dedicated services for LGBTIQ+ parents and their children.

This budget continues to strengthen our approach to delivering and securing a strong and responsive community sector. The ACT government is focusing on supporting areas of critical need and frontline services as part of a significant investment in the 2026-27 budget in community services and support for Canberrans. Building on the community sector funding boost announced last year, the 2026-27 budget further demonstrates our ongoing commitment to sector sustainability by securing a permanent funding uplift for the community sector of \$5 million a year, indexed and ongoing from 2027-28.

Through this budget, the ACT government is investing an additional \$500,000 over two years to strengthen food relief services, delivering practical, targeted support to help

Canberrans navigate cost-of-living pressures. We are also strengthening our Emergency Material and Financial Aid program, which provides timely and flexible support to people doing it tough, with an additional \$249,000 in 2026-27. Altogether, this brings our total investment in food relief and emergency aid in 2026-27 to more than \$2.7 million.

The 2026-27 budget continues to deliver the ACT government's commitment to climate action, investing in clean energy, supporting Canberrans with cost-of-living pressures and protecting our environment. This budget invests in community-led initiatives and environmental outcomes in the ACT by enabling environmental organisations to facilitate and directly deliver restoration activities and climate change mitigation and adaptation projects. This approach recognises the vital role of the community and our community groups in protecting and enhancing the natural environment.

Key initiatives in this budget include increased support for ACT Wildlife and other environmental peak bodies, establishing a biennial environmental volunteer conference, and expanding the ACT Environment Grants to support community stewardship through weed control. This budget also delivers a specialised biosecurity program to proactively manage current and emerging biosecurity threats which have the potential to harm the ACT's environment, economy and community.

Water quality and water efficiency continue to be a significant priority for the ACT government. This budget includes investment supporting implementation of the first stage of measures to improve water quality in Lake Tuggeranong, including for increased street sweeping to reduce high-nutrient leaf litter entering the lake. We are also investing in the trial, monitoring and evaluation of anti-algal technologies to better manage algal outbreaks. The government is continuing the Water Efficiency Program, which improves water use across the ACT. Key components of the program include household upgrades, water management and irrigation improvements, education campaigns, and regulatory review for better water efficiency.

The ACT government is continuing our investment in energy transformation and responsive climate action. We are continuing to support renters and low-income households through the Renters' Home Energy Program and the Home Energy Support Program, helping eligible households better manage energy use and reduce living costs. The ACT government's Climate Change Strategy will be released in the coming months, and I look forward to providing further details when the Climate Change Strategy and First Action Plan are released.

The 2026-27 budget is responsible, responsive and reflects Labor values. I commend the Treasurer and his office for their hard work in preparing this budget and ensuring it is community informed, invests in our city and environment, and supports those in our community that need it most. I look forward to the ACT government continuing to deliver for all Canberrans through this budget and work already underway, and to sharing further details on these initiatives in the months ahead.

I present the following paper:

Budget Investments—Ministerial statement, 12 June 2026.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

**MR BRADDOCK** (Yerrabi) (10.43): I welcome the minister's statement on budget investments, particularly in the area of climate. Climate is an issue important to the Canberra community, and the Greens bring that voice to this place at every opportunity. This year, we have heard from the community that they are worried. We heard from renters worried about soaring energy bills, parents anxious about extreme heat in schools, volunteers doing essential work with short-term funding and long-term uncertainty, and young people who feel the weight of decisions made today will fall squarely on their shoulders tomorrow. In recent months, that anxiety has reached fever pitch as we look down the barrel of a fuel crisis caused by our dependence on fossil fuels. Labor has shown that they are able to listen to the Greens and they are able to listen to the community when they talk about how important this issue is. The community were clear: they do not want to shoulder the burden for climate action as individuals; they want the government to step in. We have seen some encouraging steps in the right direction in this budget.

We welcome the increase in available funding for the Sustainable Household Scheme. This makes it easy for households to purchase an electric vehicles or an electric cargo bike. Increasing the loan cap to \$20,000—when the cheapest new EV is priced around \$24,000—will allow lower income households to make the swap that has been out of reach so far. Making it easy to buy a cargo bike can also make it easier for some households to switch from two cars to one or from one to none. This is about supporting people to make the transport choices that are right for them. The ACT Greens have made the point that purchasers should always be guided to the lowest emitting option, with a preference for zero emissions vehicles, and we know that this is where consumers want to go as well. Adjustments to motor vehicle duty rates reflect this and will give people the nudge they might need to make a climate-friendly choice.

Funding for our climate and environment groups was a key ask of the Greens motion on the Climate Change Strategy. We called on the government to make funding for these groups their downpayment of goodwill on further climate action. We are very pleased to see more funding for community groups on climate change mitigation and adaptation. We welcome more goodwill and more action on climate over this budget and budgets to come.

The ACT Greens also welcome the extension of rebates under the Home Energy Support Program to support lower income homeowners reduce their energy costs, as well as the continuation of the Renters' Home Energy Advice Program. These programs were initiatives introduced under the previous Greens minister. It is always encouraging to see support for programs that make a common-sense link: climate action makes good economic sense for households and for governments.

We are very pleased to see more funding dedicated to heating and cooling in schools. This is important climate adaptation work that protects our students' learning conditions and supports our path to net zero. Funding to support the new Climate Change Strategy is also very welcome, although time will tell if \$10 million over four years will meet the challenge of the moment. The Greens have made their views clear on where the next

phase of action on climate in the ACT should take us. Our strategy needs to address the concerns of the community—that we need to be going further, we need to be going faster and we need to be fair. We look forward to discussing this further once the Climate Change Strategy is released.

I also acknowledge the minister's comments yesterday when addressing the missing middle changes. Yesterday, the minister announced regular reporting on urban heat risks, further investment in heat mitigation and a second Climate Change Risk Assessment for the ACT. As the minister explained, extreme heat impacting on human health is one of the major climate risks the ACT is facing. The Greens are proud of the work we have done to raise awareness of this issue.

But this budget only goes so far, and the Greens will never stop fighting for the climate. We will never stop fighting for the community, their concerns and their aspirations. There are serious problems we need to tackle. The government needs to get serious about getting off gas and ensuring the city is not left with a stranded gas asset after 2045. We need to decarbonise our transport system, reduce our transport emissions and address the cost-of-living crisis downstream from a fuel crisis.

Climate adaptation needs urgent attention and investment if we are going to keep people safe in the face of extreme weather and climate-induced natural disaster. We will continue to call on the government to commit to a duty of care for future generations, because climate adaptation is necessary; climate surrender is not.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **Budget—Business, Arts and Creative Industries, Children, Youth and Families, Multicultural Affairs, and Skills, Training and Industrial Relations**

### **Ministerial statement**

**MR PETTERSSON** (Yerrabi—Minister for Business, Arts and Creative Industries, Minister for Children, Youth and Families, Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Minister for Skills, Training and Industrial Relations) (10.47): I rise today to update the Assembly about the investments made through this year's budget in my areas of portfolio responsibility. The 2026-27 budget prioritises health, skills and education, as well as housing. It delivers on the commitments we made to the people of Canberra at the 2024 election.

The ACT and commonwealth government are continuing to invest in Fee-free TAFE. We are working to finalise a bilateral agreement with the commonwealth that will support more than 9,000 fee-free places over five years. This important initiative, delivered under the National Skills Agreement, removes the financial barrier to entry for students to learn, retrain or upskill in priority industries. This will increase the pipeline of workers in those industries where we need it most, like construction, hospitality and the care sector.

This budget also continues to invest in CIT as the public provider of vocational education in our city. We are providing \$25 million over three years to progress the Cloud Campus Program, a vital initiative to modernise CIT's ICT infrastructure, and to

deliver a digitally enabled learning environment ensuring students can access modern, flexible and inclusive education pathways. The investment will allow CIT to respond to the evolving needs of students and industry. Completing this digital transformation will mean CIT remains a leading vocational education provider by providing high-quality, future-focused education for students, industry and the wider community.

Mr Speaker, our economy needs skilled workers. Local businesses need skilled workers now and into the future. We want more skilled workers. We want more opportunity for Canberrans, young and old. This budget delivers both.

Through this budget we are also investing to support business by continuing and expanding the Canberra Business Advice and Support Service, or CBASS. This service supports all business types, both new and existing, by providing up to four hours of tailored advice. Businesses can be connected with programs, resources and support networks to help them navigate challenges or seize opportunities. While other small business services operate in the territory, CBASS acts as a trusted first point of contact, working closely with complementary services to strengthen business.

The ACT government also remains committed to supporting the growth of local social enterprises, which is why this budget expands CBASS to support social enterprises and will enhance their expertise in non-traditional business models. Small business values CBASS. This boost means it will have an even greater capacity to drive innovation, inclusivity and new economic opportunities for the ACT.

This was a big budget for the arts and creative industries. At the 2024 election, we promised to increase arts activities funding by 50 per cent. We delivered that in the last budget. We also promised that we would increase arts organisation funding by 25 per cent. We are delivering that in this budget. Whether you are creating, performing, consuming or collecting, if you are on the stage, behind the scenes or in the audience, participating in the arts should be for every Canberran. This additional investment will support new entrants to the ACT Arts Organisation Investment Program, as well as supporting existing organisations to do even more for our community.

The government is investing \$19 million over four years to support the Cultural Facilities Corporation to prepare for and operate Canberra's landmark new 2,000-seat Lyric Theatre ahead of its 2028 opening. This covers the workforce, systems and planning needed to operate a theatre of this scale safely and successfully, while ensuring the Canberra Theatre Centre can continue to deliver high-quality performances across all of its venues.

This is not just about delivering a building; it is about bringing to life a world-class cultural destination that energises our city, connects our community and strengthens our economy. We are setting up the Lyric Theatre to open with impact, with strong programming, strong audiences and a strong sense of excitement from day one, ensuring Canberra can attract the biggest national and international productions and secure its place on the touring circuit. It means more Canberrans will be able to experience world-class shows here at home, while creating new opportunities for collaboration between local artists and major productions to grow Canberra's reputation for creative excellence.

The Lyric Theatre will be central to revitalising Civic and strengthening Canberra's night-time economy, bringing more people into the city, supporting local businesses and helping shape a vibrant and welcoming cultural precinct. At the same time, this investment will drive tourism and economic growth, attracting visitors, supporting jobs and delivering flow-on benefits across accommodation, hospitality and retail sectors. The Lyric Theatre will support employment across the creative industries, technical production, tourism, hospitality and events sectors, while creating pathways for training and skills development for the next generation.

Alongside preparing for the successful operation of the Lyric Theatre, the government is also investing \$13 million over three years to maintain and enhance the quality of our existing theatre venues. This includes upgrades to seating, carpeting and sound systems at the Playhouse.

The government also continues to deliver a broad range of cultural services for the community through its investment in Canberra's visual arts collections and heritage places. This includes delivering on the government's commitment to grow the Canberra Museum and Gallery's collection and establish a permanent digital exhibition space at Lanyon Homestead, expanding access to the collection in south Canberra. Canberra's stories will also be shared with wider audiences through the Canberra Museum and Gallery's touring exhibition program. Key highlights include *Taglietti: Life in Design*, touring to Melbourne from June to August this year, as well as to Milan, in October to December of this year. There is also the Nolan exhibition, *For the Term of His Natural Life*, which is touring to Burnie, Tasmania, from December 2026 to March 2027, as well as *Outer Space: Stromlo to the Stars*, touring to Launceston March to May 2027, and Adelaide October 2027 to January 2028.

These exhibitions highlight Canberra's contribution to national and international cultural dialogue and reinforce our reputation as a centre of creativity, research and design. This government's investment across the breadth of CFC's activities supports a rich, connected and accessible cultural life for our city, supporting major performances and events, community participation, and everyday engagement with arts, heritage and culture.

Mr Speaker, this budget also invests an additional \$1.25 million in our screen and digital games fund. This investment will continue putting Canberra on the big screen, and, indeed, small screens, by ensuring our local screen and games sectors remain competitive nationally. This funding provides certainty and enables another funding round to open for applications in 2026-27. The fund's debut has been met with overwhelming interest from both the digital games and TV and film production communities, reflecting Canberra's growing reputation as a hub for world-class digital games and visual storytelling.

And I am pleased to advise that Uppercut Games, a local developer, have had their next title announced as part of the 2026 Xbox games showcase in Los Angeles. Having their game, titled *Magicians: The Devil's Deal*, announced alongside the likes of the new *Halo*, *Gears of War* and *Spyro* titles is no small thing. I would like to congratulate co-founders Andrew James, Ed Orman, Ryan Lancaster and the entire Uppercut team on this fantastic achievement.

Success like this reflects the talents and potential in our local industry. The digital games industry in Australia is strong and growing, with over \$600 million of income generated through Australian games development. The opportunities to be found in this sector are increasingly recognised by states and territories, and investments like this one will mean the ACT can remain a competitive place for businesses to establish and grow.

Through this budget, the ACT government is continuing to support some of the most vulnerable people in our community by providing funding for two important initiatives aimed at settling and supporting humanitarian entrants in the ACT. As we promised ahead of the 2024 election, we are continuing to provide support for our most vulnerable refugees, asylum seekers and humanitarian entrants living in the ACT. This budget invests \$150,000 for the Family Settlement Assistance Grants Program, and \$135,000 for the Humanitarian Funding Program. This funding reflects our ongoing commitment to supporting this vulnerable cohort and recognises that humanitarian efforts are not just about resettlement but about building a community where everyone feels safe, secure and a sense of belonging.

This budget also provides ongoing funding uplift for the National Multicultural Festival. This increased investment will allow us to continue delivering our election commitment of improving and expanding the festival. The National Multicultural Festival is Australia's biggest celebration of cultural diversity, and we are keeping it that way. Canberrans love the Multicultural Festival. It is a flagship event for Canberra, promoting social cohesion, inclusivity and belonging, something that feels increasingly important in our current political climate.

Labor believes in funding the services for the people who need it most. That is what drives us; that is what defines this government, and that is what you will find in this budget. Within my portfolio areas, the people who need it most are the children and families in the out of home care system. This is why we are investing more than \$23 million in additional funding to deliver critical services for vulnerable children and young people with complex needs. This funding delivers on our commitments made through the National Agreement on Closing the Gap and addresses recommendations from the Our Booris, Our Way report.

In recent years, the ACT government has taken significant steps to reform youth justice and create a more therapeutic, culturally responsive system. This work continues, guided by our commitment to Closing the Gap target 11: to reduce the rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in detention by at least 30 per cent by 2031.

To guide this work, we are also progressing the youth justice strategic plan, drawing on existing government commitments, evidence and prior consultation with community organisations, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander partners, young people and families. The plan is guided by the Closing the Gap Agreement and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement Phase 3 Action Plan—ensuring a focus on equity and reducing over-representation in the justice system—and the provision of trauma-informed, developmentally appropriate support for children and young people, both in crisis and longer-term.

Key reforms in the strategic plan include the minimum age of criminal responsibility,

which is continuing the ACT's focus on diverting children from the justice system into therapeutic care, and support by ongoing investment in the Therapeutic Support Panel and the Safer Youth Response Service. The ACT government is providing additional funding to enable continued delivery of the ACT government's minimum age of criminal responsibility reforms to support the service system transition to therapeutic responses to harmful behaviours in children and young people. This initiative includes funding to continue delivering individualised therapeutic support to children and young people through the Therapeutic Support Panel and \$412,000 in 2027-28 for the continuation of the Safer Youth Response Service while further evaluation occurs.

In parallel to this, under the plan we are also developing a new strategic purpose and model of care for youth detention consistent with the Healthy Centre Review of Bimberi Youth Justice Centre. This reform will be carefully designed through consultation, evidence, and lived experience.

Through this budget we are investing in the safety, security and wellbeing of young people involved in the youth justice system by increasing funding, staffing and operational support at Bimberi Youth Justice Centre. This budget will also support a new throughcare pilot to support successful transitions from custody back to community. This program is intended to reduce reoffending by supporting young people transitioning into the community and enabling them to reconnect with family, education, employment and community services.

These investments support the ACT government's commitment to youth justice reform by strengthening capacity of Bimberi, improving outcomes for young people involved in the youth justice system, and progressing key recommendations from the Healthy Centre Review and Jumbunna Review. Importantly, this funding will ensure Bimberi can continue to operate safely and sustainably, meeting legislative, human rights, health and safety obligations while providing a secure environment for young people, staff and visitors.

This budget is also investing to ensure that our workplace protections remain nation-leading and that we are not leaving behind workers who are injured or fall sick because of the work they do. Through this budget, we are expanding our in-house rehabilitation service, increasing government's ability to support injured workers return to work in a timely and safe manner. This in-sourced service, which began in 2023, provides a cost-efficient approach to the provision of targeted and timely supports, ensuring the injured employee is at the centre, and improving individual health outcomes and reducing workers compensation costs.

Budgets reflect choices, and this year's is no different. We are delivering the commitments we took to the people of Canberra at the last election: commitments to support those who need it most; commitments to vocational education; and commitments to ensure our city remains diverse, culturally vibrant and inclusive of all who call it home. I commend the budget to the Assembly.

I present the following paper:

Budget Investments—Ministerial statement, Friday, 12 June 2026.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## Visitor

**MR DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Members, before we move to the next item, I would just like to draw your attention to Louise Littlewood, former member, who is currently residing in the gallery. You are most welcome.

## Clerk of the Assembly—Mr Tom Duncan Motion of thanks

**MR HANSON** (Murrumbidgee): I move:

That this Assembly places on record its appreciation of the long and meritorious service to the Legislative Assembly by the Clerk of the Assembly, Mr Tom Duncan, upon his impending retirement and extend to him, his wife, Kirsten, and daughters Matilda and Cassandra, every wish for health and happiness in the future.

**Members:** Hear, hear.

**MR HANSON:** Members, as we are all aware, today is the last sitting day for the Clerk, Mr Tom Duncan, who will be retiring early next year after taking some well-deserved leave. As Speaker, it is with great regret that I am farewelling Tom today. I do wish he were staying, but I am honoured to move this motion.

Tom's service to this Assembly has been long and exemplary, and it deserves our recognition and thanks. And I think that given the large number of people here in the gallery today, it is clear that Tom's contribution is widely recognised. I would like to acknowledge in the gallery Tom's family: his wife, Kirsten, and his daughters, Tilly and Cass. Also in the gallery are former members Mary Porter and Louise Littlewood; the second Clerk, Mark McRae OAM; Richard Pye, the Clerk of the Senate; and Peter Banson, the Deputy Clerk of the House of Representatives. Welcome to you all.

Tom first started working in a parliament in 1985, when he joined the Department of the House of Representatives, where he worked for five years. He started here at the Assembly in February 1990, where he was Deputy Clerk for 12 years, and then he became Clerk in September 2003. In 2000, he worked on a secondment in the New South Wales Legislative Assembly. So Tom has worked for the largest, the oldest, and the youngest parliaments in Australia.

Members, however, may not be aware that Tom first came to the building when he was in year 12 at Marist to attend a youth parliament run by the Legislative Assembly that existed prior to self-government. I am told that after attending the youth parliament and realising that the student representative council that he was the secretary of did not have any rules, he took it upon himself—true story—to draft a set of standing orders. That

was the first of many standing orders Tom would draft in his long and distinguished career. Coming full circle, and keeping it in the family, Tom's daughter, Cass, who is at school here in Canberra, recently attended an Assembly Committee Challenge in the Assembly, but we are yet to see any revision to standing orders from her!

If you want to get a real sense of how long Tom's been here, a picture is worth a thousand words. There is a series of photos in the corridor behind me, outside the Clerk's office, and it has every OLA staff for every term of this place, and Tom is in all but the first photo. He starts off in the second photo, as a bright-eyed young man, and you can watch him slowly maturing—I think that is the word we agreed on, rather than “aging”, Chief Minister—in every subsequent photo, until he is as he sits before us today: a wise elder statesman, who has surely listened to more than enough debates, questions, interjections, adjournment speeches and statements to last a lifetime.

In addition to being Clerk, Tom is also secretary of the Standing Committee on Administration and Procedure; the honorary secretary and treasurer of the ACT Branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, the CPA; the registrar of lobbyists in the ACT, and I know he loves that one; and secretary of the Former Members' Association.

His service has not been limited just to this Assembly. He has worked tirelessly to assist and develop other parliaments, both in Australia and overseas. Tom was elected to be the inaugural vice-president and the second president of the Australia and New Zealand Association of Clerks-at-the-table, ANZACATT. When the commonwealth parliament branch withdrew from the CPA, Tom was chosen by the Australian presiding officers and clerks to be the Australian regional secretary between 2014 and 2018. In addition, from 2015 to 2026, Tom was chosen by his fellow clerks to represent all Australian clerks on the Society of Clerks-at-the-Table, which represents all clerks in the commonwealth.

I would like to read an email that I was cc'd on from one of Tom's interstate colleagues, which shows how well he is respected beyond this place by his peers.

Dear Tom,

I write as a former Clerk of parliaments in Victoria, former President of ANZACATT, and former Secretary of CPA Victoria.

Noting tomorrow is your final scheduled sitting day, I want to acknowledge your outstanding contribution to the Territory's Assembly and to the broader parliamentary community. While tomorrow may not be your last day in the office, a final sitting day has great significance and emotion attached to it.

I want to particularly thank you for being a pioneer in the establishment of early guidance of the President of the ANZACATT, which is now established as one of, if not the most effective professional development associations for parliamentary officers in the world. I have benefitted from ANZACATT over many years, as did my staff.

Your work throughout the Commonwealth, through the CPA, and twinning relationships, has done much to establish Australia's reputation in the parliamentary community and helped Australia's related interests in foreign

affairs.

But above all, I thank you for being a mentor to me and many clerks and parliamentary officers and a leader in achieving parliamentary reforms for the betterment of Members and the community. Congratulations.

Andrew Young.

In recognition of the high regard in which Tom is held, various Speakers have chosen him to be on interview panels for the position of Clerk across numerous Australian parliaments. And Tom's interest in benchmarking is well known. On his initiative, the ACT Legislative Assembly became the first legislature in the commonwealth to benchmark its performance against CPA benchmarks. Tom has assisted the CPA in updating benchmarks in 2018, and he has assisted the Caribbean and South-East Asian regions, as well as the Tongan and Kiribati legislatures, with benchmarking assessments.

Tom has also assisted, with help from the CPA, the development of codes of conduct and declaration of members' interests schemes—don't we love those—for the parliaments of Belize, Anguilla, Fiji, and Tonga. And I know that Tom has played an instrumental role in partnering with two parliaments, namely the parliaments of Kiribati and Prince Edward Island.

Tom certainly likes to travel. And I have heard from former Speaker Berry that he once had to rescue him from a border guard to help him get through the border from Canada to the US, back in the day. I am sure, Tom, there are quite a few colourful stories that you could tell about your travels with MLAs overseas and interstate, but they are probably better left for another time.

Anywhere you look in the Assembly you will see examples of Tom's work, be it: the development of the Mace, which sits before us here in the Assembly; the logo, which is on about every piece of paper you will see—you can look at it everywhere, and a recent addition is the logo on the clocks throughout the Assembly, which you may not have noticed; the gifts displayed at the front entrance; and the standing orders. I know that Tom is particularly proud of the tie, and he contributed to the design of that, and today I am wearing one. Mr Deputy Speaker, I will leave it to your ruling as to whether my tie constitutes a prop or not. But my suggestion is that if you are unsure, seek advice from the Clerk!

Certainly, when I became Speaker, former Speaker Parton and former Speaker Rattenbury both came to me with only a single piece of advice—the same the same piece of wisdom: “Always seek advice from the Clerk.” This advice has stood me, so far, in good stead, and I know it has served former Speakers very well.

Tom's knowledge is encyclopedic. It is always well balanced and informed. If it is not in the standing orders, he will know where it is in the *Companion* or in the *House of Reps Practice*—or it will simply be in that large brain of his. Historically, he will know where it stems from. I know that all members, not just speakers, have benefited from his advice and wisdom over the years, and I certainly have in my nearly 18 years in this place. I am sure the Chief Minister, who has served here longer, has enjoyed the same, as we all have.

Tom has been a very strong advocate for our Assembly, and its members, during his time as Clerk. He has attended many conferences and presented papers on the role and operation of the Assembly. For the annual Presiding Officers and Clerks Conference held in July each year, Tom has presented 22 papers alone. Most of these papers are available on the Assembly website. I presume that means he has been to 22 of those conferences.

Tom's last day before he takes leave is actually on 10 July, and before then, Tom is going on his last ever trip to the Presiding Officers and Clerks Conference, which will be my first ever trip as a member of the Assembly. Hopefully we will not come back with any stories that need retelling!

As Clerk, Tom heads the Office of the Legislative Assembly and has the same powers of a director-general and some powers of a head of service. Tom managed the impact on services due to the increase from 17 to 25 members in 2016, and he has led the team that we see every day providing such a fantastic service to us all. I have also greatly appreciated the advice Tom has provided me in support of the officers of the Legislative Assembly.

During his time here he has certainly seen a lot. He has sat through 1,333 sitting days. He has seen what was 107, but I had to make it 108, censure motions or want of confidence, given the events of this week. He has helped draft 167 Speakers' rulings. He has listened to—this is bold—1,312 ministerial statements. He has seen 32,938 questions without notice and supplementaries asked. His signature is also on 2,291 acts of the Territory. Quite extraordinary.

He has seen some remarkable things in this place and some not so remarkable ones. Having spoken to Tom, some of the highlights are: two speakers occupying the Speaker's chair not wearing a tie—neither you, nor me, Mr Parton, as we always wore our ties; Santa Claus coming into the chamber, and that was recorded in *Hansard* during an adjournment debate in 1995; he was in the chamber when the Assembly had its longest sitting on 24 and 25 August 2006, when the Assembly rose at 5 am; and a member seeking and being granted leave to table a box containing a condom in 2019. On another time, after the Assembly passed the appropriation bill in 1995 at 4.03 am, the Assembly then proceeded to debate and pass a motion of censure of the Treasurer, and then, at 4.13 am, it passed a motion of censure of the Leader of the Opposition, before the Assembly adjourned finally at 4.41 am—pretty crazy days indeed!

Tom wrote to me on 26 March this year to advise me of his decision to retire and his letter contained some personal reflections that I would like to quote from so that I can share his insights with you all and so that they might be recorded in *Hansard*.

Dear Mr Speaker, it has been an honour and a privilege to serve Australia's youngest parliament from my commencement here in February 1990. Over that time, I have worked with all 97 Members elected to the Assembly and have enjoyed working with each of them.

When researching a paper that I was presenting to a conference several years ago, I came across, what I thought at the time, a rather grandiose and over the top description of democracy. The quote from the book *Of the People, By the People*:

*A New History of Democracy* stated:

“Let’s be clear from the beginning: democracy is humanity’s finest achievement. Championed, idealised, misused, abused, distorted, parodied and ridiculed it might be; courted by unfaithful lovers, glad-handed by false friends and skinned by unscrupulous allies it undoubtedly has been; but democracy as a way of living and a system of government is the avenue by which modern humans can fulfil their need to construct lives of real meaning.

More than all the paintings and sculptures on earth, more than all poems, plays and novels, and more than every scientific and technological invention put together, democracy shows humanity at its most creative and innovative; democracy is a continual, collective enterprise that binds us together while allowing us to live individually. While it endures there is hope, without democracy the world is bereft.”

Tom’s view of this was:

Given recent events across the world, I no longer feel the same way about this quote. I consider that the way we practice democracy in the Australian Capital Territory is something to be quite proud of, thanks largely to successive speakers and members being willing to adopt new practices and standing orders ever since self-government commenced in 1989. Moreover, I believe democracy is one of Australia’s greatest exports.

He continued:

I would like to express my gratitude to all my colleagues across the Office of the Legislative Assembly for their support, loyalty and friendship over many years. I want to particularly thank my two predecessors in the role, the late Don Piper and Mark McRae, OAM.

I wish you and all the other Members of the Assembly, as well as all your staff, the very best wishes for the remainder of the 11th Assembly and beyond.

Tom, thanks for those insightful and generous words in your letter; I really wanted to quote from that.

On behalf of all of the members of this place who you have worked with over many years over your distinguished career, and all of our staff—some are here today and some cannot be—and the Office of the Legislative Assembly, thank you for your significant contribution that you have made to this Assembly and for furthering the cause of democracy in the ACT. You have lived up to that quote that was in your letter—and across other parliaments that you have assisted in Australia and overseas. We wish you and your lovely family all the very best, and I hope that you enjoy your retirement.

**MR BARR** (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism and Trade): Today, I rise to do something that is both a pleasure and, to be honest, a very intimidating prospect—attempting to do justice to the career of a Clerk who has not only seen absolutely everything that this Assembly can produce, but has somehow managed to keep a straight face while doing so.

Mr Speaker, thank you for moving this motion. It is important that we properly recognise someone whose contribution to this place has been so significant over so many years. Tom, on behalf of the government, I want to sincerely thank you for your service to this, the ACT Legislative Assembly.

As Chief Minister and, I believe, the longest-serving member in this place, I have had the privilege of seeing firsthand the dedication, professionalism and integrity that you have brought to your role. I say “privilege”, but I should also acknowledge that, perhaps from your perspective, it has likely required a great deal more endurance than it has privilege, because the role of Clerk is, in many ways, the most demanding job in this building. It requires the encyclopaedic knowledge of standing orders, the judgement of a seasoned diplomat, the neutrality of a judicial officer and, let us be honest, the patience of someone who has to repeatedly explain the same rules to the same people, sometimes in the same sitting, yet somehow you have managed all of that with calm authority.

Your experience across the New South Wales parliament, the Australian parliament and as Deputy Clerk meant you have brought a depth of experience that has underpinned your steady leadership here in this parliament. As we have heard, during your tenure you have handled just a few minor challenges. You oversaw the expansion of the Assembly from 17 to 25 members, which effectively increased the volume of democracy and, inevitably, the volume in this place generally. You guided the Assembly through the COVID pandemic, working out how to keep this democracy functioning when even basic human interaction was suddenly a massive logistical challenge. You have supported this Assembly to debate some of the most significant and progressive legislation in any parliament in our commonwealth. Along the way, you have strengthened the systems that keep this place working, ensuring procedures are clear, robust and transparent.

Your work on the *Companion to the Standing Orders* has given future members a document that they will refer to often—and, if we are being honest, has left future members with at least a fighting chance of understanding what they are supposed to be doing in this place!

As we have heard, you have supported all 97 members elected to this Assembly equally, impartially and with remarkable consistency. To put this in perspective, that is at least 97 different interpretations of standing orders, and you have handled all of them. You have kept the chamber running, committees functioning, *Hansard* accurate and you have ensured the entire parliamentary operation continues to move forward—often, let us be honest, while many members were doing their very best to test the limits of the system.

Beyond Canberra, your work with the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, your engagement with other legislatures and your support for the parliament of Kiribati reflect a commitment to democracy that extends well beyond this territory.

Tom, of course, there is one other institution that has clearly demanded a comparable level of loyalty from you over the years, and that is the Collingwood Football Club. I think we can safely say that your dedication to Collingwood has come extraordinarily close to matching your dedication to this place. The important distinction is this: in this place the rules are written down, there is at least an attempt at consistency and most of

the time decisions can be explained. Collingwood, on the other hand, offers none of these guarantees. It is an exercise in pure emotional resilience that involves enduring highs, lows, controversy, unexpected turns and the occasional outcome that, let us face it, defies logic, procedure and common sense, and all in the space of a few hours.

In many ways, it has been the perfect training ground for this role, because the same qualities apply—staying calm under pressure, maintaining composure when things get very unpredictable, and resisting the temptation to intervene when things clearly are not going to plan. And just like a seasoned supporter, you have never lost faith. You simply applied the rules, kept things moving and let the rest of us try and work it out.

Beyond all of that, it is important that we recognise the person behind the role. Your generosity with your time and expertise, your support for colleagues and staff and your steady leadership have earned respect across this Assembly. The Clerk's work is often unseen, but it is absolutely essential, and your contribution has left this place stronger, more resilient and better equipped for the future. You have left behind what might be your most enduring legacy—a standard that I think will make life deeply uncomfortable for all those who follow you.

On behalf of all members, I thank you for your service, your leadership, your wisdom and your extraordinary patience. We wish you and your family a long, happy and well-earned retirement from this place, one with fewer standing orders, fewer rulings and far fewer points of order—and, of course, plenty of time to focus on Collingwood, where, after years of maintaining strict procedural neutrality, you can finally express an opinion, even if the umpire and the rest of us still will not agree with you. Thank you very much, Tom. All the best for the future.

**MR PARTON** (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition): Tom, my friend, it is not going to be the same. It is not going to be the same.

I rise to thank Mr Duncan for anchoring this parliament for much more than a quarter of a century. And, from this day forward, for anyone turning up at the ACT Legislative Assembly and discovering that Tom Duncan is no longer here, it would be like getting to Sydney and finding that they have dismantled the Sydney Harbour Bridge.

As we found our ways in the Assembly over the time that this Assembly has existed, you have been the constant. You have been the genuine guiding light for so many who have come through this place. You have conducted yourself in the most exemplary fashion every single day of your working life in this place. Literally hundreds of MLAs, their staff and Assembly staff have relied heavily on your guidance over that time, and you have played a greater role in helping this parliament to be what it is today than any other individual.

I am absolutely certain that everybody in this extended room would agree that you, Mr Duncan, are an icon of the ACT Legislative Assembly and an icon for democracy in Canberra. It was a great privilege to be appointed as the chief presiding officer of this place after the last election. I was not the best Speaker this place has ever had, but I was not the worst. I cannot begin to explain how heavily I relied on the advice, the guidance and the friendship of Mr Duncan in the 12 months that I was the Speaker.

There are those who will say, “Tom, I couldn’t do this without you.” I am the only one who put my money where my mouth is, because when I discovered that you were going, I said, “No, I can’t do this. I’m looking for an easier gig now.” That is pretty much how that happened!

I wish you the best and, from a West Coast man to a Collingwood man, you were robbed in 2018, but that is just the way the ball bounces. Thank you.

**MS CLAY** (Ginninderra): I want to pay tribute today to our retiring Clerk of the Assembly, Tom Duncan, who is leaving here after more than 35 years of service, including over 22 years as Clerk. And that is before counting the experience he brought from the federal parliament. Thirty-five years of service is an immense achievement. It is longer than some of the members here have been alive, and that is such deep commitment.

I am speaking on behalf of my Greens colleagues, past and present, and on behalf of our staff. I am also speaking on behalf of our recently departed, much-missed former leader, Shane Rattenbury. Shane was not here as long as Tom, but Shane reflected that he might not have been here—he might not have lasted for his 17 years—but for Tom. We heard about this during Shane’s valedictory. He told us about his record-breaking short interval between being sworn in as an MLA and taking the Speaker’s chair, and how heavily he leant on Tom during that time—how grateful he was to Tom for that expertise, that calm and clear advice and that impartial wisdom. There are so many people in that situation that you have helped, Tom, and, on behalf of all of us, we thank you for that.

Tom did not limit his attention only to the Assembly’s processes. He maintained an active interest in the way other jurisdictions ran their chambers, including his recent advocacy for the Western Australian state parliament to replace Christian prayer with silent reflection in their openings, as has been done here in the ACT since 1995. More recently, he was up at the house on the hill as a witness to an inquiry into their petitions process. One of my staff told me they were listening to the broadcast of that hearing. They could hear the chair ask the witnesses if they had any reflections on their processes, followed shortly by, “Yeah, I thought you might.” There was a chuckle, then Tom started contributing.

That is what Tom has always done. He has been helpful and generous with his advice, and he has always been wise in how he shares it, and always very conscious of not overstepping the very careful marks that are laid down here when it comes to different people’s roles and what Tom’s role is there.

You might be looking for advice on something from chamber support, only to turn around and see Tom standing nearby. His ears have pricked up; he knows somebody is going to need him soon. There is a bat signal in the air, and Tom is always there!

You can always rely on Tom to be knowledgeable, approachable and attentive, and it has created a real sense of confidence, particularly for a bunch of new Greens. When we first came in here, we were deeply grateful for that.

Everyone here knows that, if they mess up procedurally, Tom and his excellent team

will be there to save us from ourselves. I have used that many times. We once had a debate on a bill with a package of 125 amendments. It was the planning legislation. We were up until 3 am the night before, writing the speech. The best we could do the next day was to say, “Tom, please help us. Keep an eye on us and make sure that this flows through.” And it always did.

Tom is also exceptionally professional, to a fault. Members in here are very aware that the Greens like to operate on a first-name basis. Mr Braddock has been trying to get Tom to call him Andrew for his whole political career, and he has never once managed to do that. Tom, I hope that, on your way out the doors, you will call Andrew by his first name. He would really, really love you to.

MLAs come and go, according to the vagaries of the electorate, the wider world and the Hare-Clark system, but the Assembly staff who support us stay the course. That does not just make our lives easier; that makes democracy better. If it were not for that backbone, we would not be able to perform our roles. We would not be able to do the things that the community has asked us to do. We would not be able to bring those voices in here, and this place would not run smoothly and professionally, as it mostly manages to do.

Tom symbolises that calm strength, that wisdom and that professionalism. He has always embodied that, and we are so grateful for that. Having heard the tributes from so many people today, from a Speaker, ex-Speakers and an ex-leader of the Greens, I trust that you understand the mark that you have left, Tom, and we will miss you.

**MS CARRICK** (Murrumbidgee): I agree with Mr Parton; it is not going to be the same without Tom Duncan in the Assembly. I want to record my sincere thanks to him for his remarkable 35 years of service to this Assembly and to the people of the ACT.

When I first entered this place as a new member, the induction process was extensive and, at times, overwhelming—standing orders, procedures, committees, motions, amendments and more. Tom brought a sense of calm and clarity to that experience. He made the transition into this role far more manageable, which is invaluable for any new member.

Tom, thank you. Your support has been terrific. Your knowledge of this Assembly is extraordinary, but what stands out most is how you share it. You have always been accessible, clear and thoughtful in your advice, helping members to understand not just the rules but their purpose. In doing so, you have strengthened this Assembly’s ability to scrutinise debate and represent our communities effectively—a significant contribution to democracy in the ACT.

You also encouraged me to engage in the broader opportunities of this role, including parliamentary associations, committees and inter-parliamentary work. That encouragement helped me to grow, and to better understand the work we do here.

Just as importantly, you have built trust across this Assembly. Members have relied on your judgement, fairness and integrity—qualities developed over many years of consistent service. You have also helped to shape a supportive workplace culture, making this institution function more effectively for everyone.

Through changing governments, members and debates, you have provided a steady foundation. Much of your work happens behind the scenes, in advice, preparation and guidance, but its importance cannot be overstated.

I will also miss your humour and your stories. You have 35 years to draw on, and it is fascinating to hear what has happened over the decades. Your stories remind us that this Assembly is not just about rules and procedure, but about people.

Tom, I hope retirement brings you time to enjoy the things you love, your walks and travels with Kirsten, and your great group of friends. You leave with my deepest respect and gratitude. Thank you for your service, your knowledge, your generosity and the support you gave me as a new member. You will be greatly missed.

**MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi):** Tom has been an amazing help to all of us, as we have heard today in the Assembly. I want to highlight something that Mr Speaker spoke of. Recently, Minister Pettersson and I attended a conference in the Maldives. It was on small branches and small parliaments. One of the instructors, one of the workshop leaders, walked straight up to us and said, “You guys have the best parliament. I will be referring to you guys when it comes to all these things.” It was a testament to Tom that, throughout that whole conference, it was crystal-clear that everybody in that place needed to replicate what goes on here in the Assembly. I want to thank you for that, Tom. We have been set up really well.

On a personal note, we have not interacted a lot, but when we have, you have been unflappable, considered and professional, and I really appreciate everything you have done. The way that the OLA staff jump into gear is also a testament to your amazing leadership, as is the way this place runs like a well-oiled machine; thank you.

With respect to Collingwood, I think that, in our MLA school—those of you who joined with me in 2020—every example would have referred to Collingwood in some way, shape or form. Thank you, Tom, and I appreciate everything you have done.

**MR EMERSON (Kurrajong):** I, too, would like to thank the outgoing Clerk, Tom Duncan, for his service to this Assembly and, through this Assembly, to our democracy and to our community. As Ms Carrick reflected on, especially as independents, and not having the support of a party framework around us, we rely incredibly heavily on the Office of the Legislative Assembly, and especially on the Clerk.

I was alerted to that shortly after the 2024 election, when the former chief of staff of Michael Moore, one of the last independents to have been elected to this place previously, reached out to me and said, “Make sure you speak as soon as you can with Tom Duncan. He’s been there forever and he’s a good egg.” That turned out very much to be the case.

I have greatly appreciated Tom’s knowledge, his wisdom and how personable he is. We have been able to have conversations in good humour. A joke is always on offer, and he has been incredibly valuable to me in letting me know what I can do and what I cannot do—whether I really cannot do that thing, and whether I really can do that thing. I greatly appreciate his support, and I will absolutely miss it.

I could not think of a gift to give him, so yesterday I gave him the gift of using a standing order that we agree may not have been used for 21 years prior, which seems to be the most befitting gift for someone like Tom.

As other members have reflected, this place will not be the same without you. I know I will miss you, personally, and I am very thankful for your support.

**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): As one of Tom’s local MLAs, I want to say congratulations. It has been such an honour to work with you over the past six years.

I first met Tom out the front of Cooleman Court. He came and asked me for a flyer and introduced himself as the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly. What I did not let on was that I actually did not really know what that meant. Tom informed me that he would take the flyer; it had my phone number on it and, if I was successful in the election, I would be getting a phone call from him afterwards. I was very honoured to receive that phone call, and from that moment on I knew what the Clerk of the Assembly did.

It has been amazing—the ups and downs of my time in this place. The “up” was definitely going to Kiribati with the Clerk and Mr Parton and seeing what an impact Tom has had, particularly in the Pacific region, and the respect in which he is held overseas, internationally, by other parliaments and parliamentarians, as well as the incredible work he has done in promoting and sharing democracy, and upholding the ACT as a parliament that strives for best practice. A “down”—not really a down; one of the more interesting times, I would say—was the constitutional challenge. Some of our members were involved in that; it was an incredibly interesting moment in history in this Assembly.

I do have a habit of running into both the Clerk and the Deputy Clerk in supermarket aisles. I hope to continue to do that and to have fascinating conversations. I really wish you all the best. You have undertaken this role with such integrity and dedication, and I wish you well in your next steps.

**MS LEE** (Kurrajong): Tom, I do not know that there is much more to add. I want to put on the record my sincere thanks to you. I also recall the very first phone call that I received from you. Of course, it was from a number that I did not know. You introduced yourself and, from that moment on, it was “Ms Lee”. Like Andrew, I think we have all tried to get you to call us by our first names, and none of us has succeeded.

The first CPA conference that I attended with you was to the Cook Islands. I had been elected for a month. It was Mr Pettersson, me, the former Speaker Mrs Dunne and you. It was clear from that moment—even though I had no idea what was going on, except that I had never seen so many shorts and thongs being worn by elected members in my life—that you were obviously held in very high regard by anyone from across the Pacific that came along to the conference.

I also made the decision to do Mr Pettersson and myself in to speak at this conference,

despite the fact that we had been elected for one month. I hope that we did not embarrass you and Mrs Dunne too much.

Mr Speaker spoke about the box containing a condom that was tabled in the Assembly. The Chief Minister spoke about how you have always been able to keep a straight face. I was not here at the time that that happened, so I cannot make a judgement call, but I wonder whether your face also stayed straight when Mrs Jones attempted to table some breast pumps in the Assembly.

Whenever there is any controversy with any ruling, and the Deputy Speaker or one of the Assistant Speakers is in the chair, you can guarantee that Tom is at that doorway, waiting to see whether any of the MLAs are going to take advantage of any way that there is flappability in the Chair. Thank you for always being there.

I think we are all in agreement that there is no-one who is nerdier than Tom when it comes to standing orders and rules, and companions to standing orders. Whenever I have gone to seek advice from Tom, he would always have a story: “This reminds me of the time in 1995, when Mr So-and-So actually brought this up. But this is slightly different because of this.” You can tell that it was not just a duty that called but a passion in terms of how standing orders are drafted. And now we know from Mr Speaker that that passion started well before you started in this parliament.

There are a lot of people in this community who think that politicians are the ones who hold power, because we make the laws, but today I think we have realised that the person who makes the rules that govern the lawmakers actually holds a lot of power. Thank you for being such a stalwart in that regard, and a guardian of that.

I have to say that the full gallery here is a testament to so many lives that you have touched. It is either that or these people are all here to make sure that you are actually leaving after 35 years here in this place! I do wish you all the very best—you and your family, who, of course, have gone through the ups and downs, just like many of us and our families have.

I do not want to conclude by calling you out on anything, but I have to say something about the last letter that you wrote to the Speaker, announcing your resignation, that Mr Speaker read out. I am going to have to call this out. You enjoyed working with each of us? Surely, that cannot be! In that regard, thank you very much for your service and best wishes to you and your family.

**MS TOUGH** (Brindabella): Thank you, Mr Duncan. Thank you, Tom. As a relatively new member in this chamber, I want to put on record my thanks to you for all your support. Having walked into this chamber as new member No 93, which, coincidentally, matches my birth year, and makes me one of the members of this Assembly who has been alive for less time than you have been in this building, I really want to thank you.

I walked into this building and very quickly became the Labor whip. I know nothing else in this place, other than being a whip. Your guidance and support, and your unflappability on admin and procedure, no matter what we are discussing, means that I can walk into your office, or into the Deputy Clerk’s office, and request the strangest advice, or say, “I’m thinking about this thing, what does it actually mean?” As Ms Lee

said, you will be able to think of something that has happened in the last 37 years that is similar but different. You will be able to find somewhere in the companion or in the standing orders to assist with whatever thing I have been thinking of or that I am harping on to someone else about.

I also want to thank you for your help with my failed attempt recently to become the CWP Australia Chair, setting a cat amongst the pigeons in parliaments across the country, just by nominating to be the chair. Unfortunately, it was a failed attempt, but I enjoyed the stories and the fun we had along the way, in doing that. When I told the CWP Australia Steering Committee recently of your impending retirement, everyone was quite sad. People from across the country, some of whom had never met you but know of you, wanted to pass on their best wishes. In saying that, former Speaker Burch also wanted to pass on her best wishes to you and your family for the future.

I want to conclude by saying thank you. I pass on my best wishes. I wish you all the best. I am sure we will see you around somewhere. I do not think we can really keep you away. I am sure you will continue to provide advice to the Deputy Clerk, future Clerks and everyone here.

**MR COCKS** (Murrumbidgee): I am also one of the Clerk's local members. Strangely enough, it was also in front of Cooleman Court that I first met him. In my case, however, he did not introduce himself as the Clerk, because I was there with Mr Hanson. Of course, he came up and had a conversation with Mr Hanson, who for some time had been his local member. He took one of my flyers as well. He headed off, and Mr Hanson came over to me and said, "You know who that was, don't you?" I dutifully responded, "I have no idea." I have since come to know very well the man that Tom is.

There has been a lot said today about the support that he provides to members right across this place. I wholeheartedly agree. What has not been said is the support that he provides to every person in this place—not just the members of his staff, but the members of staff of every person here, and the very human support that he has provided to staff.

I would like to say a very, very big thank you, not just to a great Clerk, but to a good man.

**MR DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Members, before I put the question on the motion of thanks, the Clerk has passed me a note, and it reads:

Can I thank all members for their kind comments. Can I also thank all those in the public gallery who have honoured me by their presence. Normally, when members speak without the limitation of time, with no speech clock operating, I get a little nervous. But for some reason today, I don't mind.

It has been an honour and a privilege to be your Clerk. I wish you all the best for the remainder of the Eleventh Assembly and beyond.

Signed, Clerk.

Alas, no Tom! With the personal indulgence of members, I would also like to add my personal thanks to the Clerk. Whilst it has been amusing watching his neck grow red,

as the comments about him have been effusive today, I do appreciate all the time and effort he has provided to me in my time here.

I must say, Mr Hanson, that I hold you personally responsible for accepting his resignation and not convincing him to stay for longer.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **Budget—Police, Fire and Emergency Services; Women; Prevention of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence; and Corrections**

### **Ministerial statement**

**DR PATERSON** (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services, Minister for Women, Minister for the Prevention of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence, Minister for Corrections and Minister for Gaming Reform) (11.49): At the heart of every strong and confident community is a simple promise: when people need help, someone will be there—prepared, capable, compassionate and ready to act.

Today, I rise to speak to a budget that not only delivers on that promise but strengthens it for all members of our community. This budget is about people—the paramedic who answers the call in the middle of the night, the police officer who responds to heightened and complex situations. It is also about those who too often need these services most—vulnerable people experiencing violence, inequality or harm, and who rely on a system that is responsive, trauma-informed and accessible.

This budget reflects a clear and deliberate commitment to building a stronger, safer and more equitable community. It strengthens frontline and emergency services, while also investing significantly in addressing domestic, family and sexual violence, recognising that safety is not only about the response, but about early intervention, recovery and long-term change.

Canberra continues to be one of the safest jurisdictions in the nation, and the latest *Report on government services* confirms that our community reports one of the highest levels of confidence and satisfaction with police services in Australia. As minister, I recognise that these outcomes reflect the dedication and professionalism of our police and emergency services personnel. But we cannot be complacent. Building on a strong foundation, I am committed to working every day to further strengthen community safety, improve trust and confidence in policing, and ensure that our services remain responsive, effective and focused on the evolving needs of Canberrans.

As I announced last year, the ACT government is investing in critical infrastructure planning for ACT Policing's existing and future facilities. I am pleased to update that progress on this work has been significant. Following an expression of interest process to shortlist potential partners, we have now moved to the next stage of procurement, with planning underway for the request for proposal process for a new ACT police headquarters and city police station. The new facilities will be situated in the city precinct, ensuring strong links to the courts, ACT government buildings and the Australian Federal Police.

This investment will deliver modern, purpose-built workspaces that support our police officers, specialist facilities that enable best practice responses to crime and support for victims, and stronger service levels, operational efficiency and business continuity. The government remains committed to ensuring our existing police facilities meet the needs of ACT Policing and our community as this important future work continues.

We have seen too many shootings of police across Australia in recent years, and this serves as a stark reminder about firearms-related crime and the role our officers play in keeping our communities safe, and the ever-present danger they face daily. Over the next two years, the government will continue modernising firearms management through a fully digital firearms registry, designed to integrate with the National Firearms Register.

This will provide a single national source of firearms and licence information and enable real-time information sharing to enhance law enforcement's ability to monitor movements and manage risks to frontline police officers and the public. This budget invests \$20.1 million over three years in this initiative. The government will also continue to negotiate with the commonwealth on the National Gun Buyback and the extent of the federal government contribution to fund this.

The ACT government also continues to deliver on its commitment to increase police numbers by 150, a commitment that we are well on track to meet. In the 2024-25 financial year, 89 new recruits graduated and commenced with ACT Policing. A further 83 have graduated since July last year and additional classes are underway at the AFP college. This sustained investment is strengthening our ability to prevent, detect and respond to crime, increasing frontline capacity and visibility across the ACT and building a sustainable policing workforce to match our growing city's needs.

As a member of the Canberra community calls for an ambulance for a life-threatening situation, they can have confidence in the ACT Ambulance Service's ability to respond. ACTAS officers deliver care, compassion and clinical excellence that is consistently ranked amongst the strongest in the country. They shoulder a year-on-year significant increase in workload. As a result, our government has listened and will provide \$24.9 million over four years to strengthen the ACT Ambulance Service's response capability and support our workforce.

Our ambulance service will welcome 20 new paramedics, six intensive care paramedics and six operational support positions. This ongoing investment in workforce continues to build on resources provided in the previous budget to recruit new staff for the joint emergency station in Molonglo, as well as 30 additional paramedics funded in 2023-24. This continued investment reflects the government's commitment to the needs of our growing community and further ensures our frontline paramedics are properly supported as they go about their critical work.

To further strengthen our Emergency Services, the government will provide \$32 million over four years in additional funding to ACT Fire & Rescue crews for the new Molonglo emergency services station. When the community is running away from danger, our firefighters run towards it, and the ACT government continues to invest in our services to respond.

The new Molonglo services station will provide the community with an emergency response service that keeps pace with expected population growth in Molonglo, whilst providing critical care and response to the existing population of the region. The station, funded in the 2023-24 budget, is now complete and will be operational in the coming months. The new station will improve community safety and wellbeing, equip our emergency responders to protect residents and their property, and strengthen public confidence and outcomes during emergencies.

In addition to these important initiatives, the government will also invest more than \$25 million over the next three years to replace the Emergency Services Agency's operational fleet vehicles and upgrade workshop facilities, \$4.8 million in capital funding to support ongoing upgrades to the ESA's major ICT systems, ensuring critical operations remain reliable, and a further \$1.3 million in capital funding and \$800,000 in expense funding to develop an ESA infrastructure master plan, guiding the long-term maintenance of existing facilities and informing future emergency services locations across the territory.

The ACT government remains committed to maintaining facilities at the Alexander Maconochie Centre, ensuring appropriate technology exists to ensure the safety and wellbeing of staff and detainees, and provide meaningful access to programs and services that support rehabilitation and integration. In 2025-26, ACT Corrective Services received \$2.4 million over two years for facility upgrades, and I am pleased to report that the replacement of the electronic security system core switch was completed in November last year. The installation of a new metal detector was completed in April this year, delivering a safer and more secure centre for staff, detainees and visitors.

The 2026-27 budget invests \$10 million over two years to further significantly upgrade the electronic security system at the AMC and address security black spots through additional cameras. This investment will also support critical scoping work to determine future installation of wi-fi infrastructure, which will eventually facilitate the rollout of tablets for use by detainees for a range of purposes, including access to education programs and video conferencing.

The ACT government is also committed to ensuring people receive the support they need when exiting custody. The 2026-27 budget will invest \$8.6 million over four years to continue important programs which provide essential throughcare support to detainees exiting the AMC. This includes the continuation of the Justice Housing Program, which includes 10 properties, providing detainees transitioning out of custody with safe, secure housing and wraparound services that they need to rebuild their lives in the community.

Similarly, the Transitional Accommodation Program provides a culturally responsive service, where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men can be housed and supported to transition back into the community, improving outcomes and supporting reduced recidivism. These programs provide real, practical support to people leaving the AMC on parole or community correction orders, reflecting the government's commitment to reducing recidivism and supporting reintegration.

Delivering equitable justice outcomes for the community is central to Closing the Gap and delivering on our commitments for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

community. In addition to providing ongoing funding for the Transitional Accommodation Program, the government will provide funding of \$3.3 million to support continued delivery of an integrated case management service for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander detainees, providing culturally safe engagement and coordinated responses to address the interconnected drivers of reoffending. The case management model provides both direct support for individuals navigating the justice system and a coordinated brokerage function that integrates.

Finally, the 2026-27 budget includes \$5.4 million to establish a six-month board of inquiry into Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander deaths in custody at the AMC. This work has been developed in genuine partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members and includes funding for community organisations to deliver counselling and support services for the community, and to establish a legal financial assistance scheme for witnesses. Recruitment of members of the board is well underway, and we have received a large number of high-quality expressions of interest.

While electronic monitoring remains a commitment that the ACT government is broadly supportive of, the scoping and market testing carried out to date have indicated very high costs associated with the implementation. Given the current significant cost pressures experienced in delivering corrective services and competing priorities presented over this term of government, such as investment in AMC infrastructure and the board of inquiry, the ACT government has made the decision not to proceed with the implementation of an electronic monitoring scheme in this term of government.

I am proud to speak of the significant investment through this budget in services and programs which address the ongoing epidemic of domestic, family and sexual violence in our community, in line with the vision set out in the ACT's Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Strategy, which I tabled in the last sitting.

Through the 2026-27 budget, the government has provided \$47.8 million over four years to implement the first action plan of the ACT Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Strategy 2026-36. \$44.2 million is allocated for frontline services in direct support of key initiatives, including establishing ongoing funding stability for critical frontline services, continued investment in children and young people programs, addressing key service gaps for the ACT's most vulnerable people, and securing ongoing funding for two key sexual violence programs, as well as building a sustainable ACT men's behaviour change sector.

The 2026-27 budget will also provide \$3.6 million over four years to build and embed system foundations in line with the first action plan. This funding will provide critical enabling functions consistently identified in evidence-based reviews as essential for a best practice domestic, family and sexual violence system. This builds on 2025-26 budget funding to support investment in frontline services, where \$30.5 million was provided under the Safer Families package.

The ACT government continues to make significant investments to build a safer, more equitable society for all Canberrans. As Minister for Women, I am proud to deliver the annual Women's Budget Statement, which reflects our ongoing commitment to embed gender-responsive budgeting and highlights key budget investments across all portfolios, aimed at addressing inequality, promoting safety and ensuring we provide

inclusive and accessible services.

Importantly, this budget sees us move to a business-as-usual approach to implementation of the Period Products and Facilities (Access) Act 2023. Through this, the government has achieved its commitment to ensure free period products are permanently available in ACT public schools, sporting pavilions, libraries, public health facilities, child and family centres, and ACT courts.

This budget is a statement of our values and our priorities. It demonstrates that we will continue to stand beside those who serve our community—equipping our emergency services, strengthening our policing capability, and ensuring our corrective services remain safe, effective and focused on rehabilitation.

Just as importantly, it reflects our determination to confront some of the most persistent and complex challenges facing our society. The ongoing investment in preventing domestic, family and sexual violence, and in embedding gender equality across all our systems, is not incidental; it is central, because a safer community cannot be achieved without addressing the root causes of violence, inequality and harm.

We know that real change requires sustained effort. It requires listening to communities, backing frontline services, and supporting victim-survivors. It requires building systems that are not only strong, but fair, inclusive and responsive to the needs of all. This budget continues that work, building on past investments, strengthening what works, and laying the groundwork for long-term reform.

This is a budget that invests in safety, justice and dignity. In doing so, it invests in the future of every Canberran. I am proud of what this government has delivered, and I look forward to working with my colleagues to continue delivering for our community, through the investments we are announcing this week and the important work already well underway.

I present the following paper:

Budget Investments—Ministerial statement, Friday, 12 June 2026.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

**MS VASSAROTTI** (Kurrajong) (12.04): I rise to make a few comments in relation to the minister's update on budget initiatives in areas of her responsibility. Investments in the area of improving justice, including First Nations justice and support for victim-survivors of domestic and family violence, are particularly welcome. We know that ensuring that supported pathways out of detention is essential to reducing recidivism. As such, continued support through the care process, case management and Justice Housing is particularly welcome. It will be important to scrutinise the level of this support to ensure that it is adequate.

While it is important to ensure that our justice facility is fit for purpose, the need to continue to back restorative justice and investment to prevent the justice system being

needed are important. This is something that the ACT Greens will continue to champion and advocate for. It is really pleasing to see the focus on First Nations justice. Just this week, once again we bore witness to the ongoing challenges that we have around the justice system, which, based on the statistics as well as the experience of our local community, appears to be inherently racist. It is key that work in this area, particularly on issues such as the board of inquiry, is First Nations led and trauma informed. We will need to see that the board of inquiry's work not only provides an opportunity for truth-telling but also delivers on better outcomes for our First Nations community.

I acknowledge the significant investment in supporting domestic and family violence support services, as well as sexual assault and violence services. This sector has been vocal in the desperate need for this investment. Again, it will be important to ensure that this investment is adequate and delivers on the commitments that the government has made in relation to responding to the scourge of domestic and family violence, as well as sexual assault and sexual violence. We look forward to continuing to explore the commitments made in the lead-up to the main budget debate.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## Orders of the day—discharge

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

That, pursuant to standing order 152, order of the day No 1, Assembly business, relating to the membership of the Standing Committee on Transport and City Services, be discharged from the Notice Paper.

## Standing Committees Membership

**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) (12.08): I move:

That this Assembly:

- (1) amends the resolution of the Assembly of 3 December 2024, as amended on 4 February 2025, 26 June 2025, 4 December 2025 and 26 March 2026, that established general purpose standing committees, as follows:
  - (a) omit subparagraph 14(d);
  - (b) after paragraph (17), insert:
 

“(17A) Ms Leanne Castley MLA will chair the Standing Committee on Transport and City Services;”;
  - (c) in the last column of the eighth row of the table, which describes the membership of the Standing Committee on Transport and City Services, omit:
 

“3 Member committee  
1 Liberal Member  
1 Labor Member

- 1 Greens Member”  
and substitute:  
“4 Member committee  
Ms Leanne Castley MLA  
1 Liberal Member  
1 Labor Member  
1 Greens Member”; and
- (d) the Liberal Member to serve on the Standing Committee on Transport and City Services must be notified in writing to the Speaker within two hours following conclusion of the debate on this matter;
- (2) notes that:
- (a) the arrangement at (1) is intended to preserve continuity in the work of the committee and maintain a proportionate distribution of standing committee chairs having regard to the current composition of the Assembly; and
- (b) with regard to select committees:
- (i) the current number is creating considerable pressure on committee resourcing and membership; and
- (ii) all current select committees are due to report before or by 15 September 2026; and
- (3) agrees:
- (a) to review standing committees, membership and chairing arrangements in the context of what select committees still exist and/or are proposed in the September sitting period, with the process of review to be determined; and
- (b) that the provisions of this resolution, so far as they are inconsistent with the standing orders, have effect notwithstanding anything contained in the standing orders.

I am moving this motion as Manager of Government Business. I did not expect that I would even have to speak on this, but it is worth putting on the record. The motion is intended to be narrow. At the start of this Assembly, I move the resolution that established our standing committees. That is the MGB’s job. It is negotiated, but that is the MGB’s job. That resolution provides that the chair of this committee is to be a member of the Liberal Party. The motion today removes that single requirement whilst seeking to preserve Liberal membership so that the member currently chairing the committee may continue to chair it, particularly because the committee is in the middle of an inquiry.

The motion suggests we all come back and have another squiz at membership when the Assembly next sits in September. The select committees will have concluded, the Greens leadership and flow-ons from that will have occurred, and perhaps some temperature in this place will have been lowered. Effectively, it is intended to be a short-term measure on continuity, and then: “Let’s have another look.”

Colour me surprised, comments on some of the framing have come back to me, so let

me address it. Moving resolutions about the operation of this Assembly's committees is the ordinary work of the Manager of Government Business, and I wrote the resolution this motion amends. When the assumption—my assumption is based on calculations as well—behind a resolution no longer holds, it makes sense that the member who moved it is the natural person to then bring it up to date. I do not think there is anything unusual about that. It is housekeeping, and the MGB does housekeeping.

This committee scrutinises my portfolios—that is true; I am not neutral here—but so does almost every committee of this place. I am pretty sure every standing committee, except for the public accounts committee, touches on at least something, if not a lot, of what I am responsible for. So, if proximity to my portfolio has disqualified me from ever moving a procedural motion about a committee, I do not think I could move one at all and the role of MGB probably could not function, and that would be true of any other minister too. So let me put it on the record further: I am not neutral, but—I want to be just as direct—no-one in this chamber is. On the question of committee composition, disinterest is not available to any of us, so the test cannot be whether I am neutral, because no mover could ever be. What I am asking for is that the principle is judged.

The other comment that has come back to me is: “What arrangement might there be?” There is no arrangement. No deal has been done. Nothing has been traded. The best answer to any suspicion about what this motion is for is to look at what it actually does. It allows the member who has been chairing an active inquiry to finish that inquiry. That continuity matters in its own right. The committee has heard evidence and it has built a line of questioning. There is a working relationship with the people who have come before it. It is an inquiry that matters to all of us. And you do not change the chair in the middle of an inquiry without it costing that inquiry, especially when it has nothing to do with the inquiry at all or there is no other very good reason.

I was reflecting on Mr Cocks earlier this week. When he was discharged from the committee that he had been chairing, that was at a natural point, at the conclusion of the inquiry. The heart of it is that this is not about reward. Probably the most shocking thing I have heard is that some members in this place are thinking about their vote in the context of not wanting to reward a member for becoming an Independent. I agree, it should not be a reward, and it is not. It is not about handing out prizes. The question is: should the chamber strip a member of a role that she currently holds and is discharging, with no complaint about how she has discharged it, for the single reason that she has chosen to sit as an Independent? I do not think it should. My party does not think it should. If the response of this chamber to a member exercising the right to leave a party is to remove roles they hold, then we have attached a penalty to independence itself. I guess that is why I have been quite surprised to hear how at least the other two Independent members are voting. It feels like a very poor principle.

The other issue is the “who”. I will not go into this at length. A committee chair must be capable of lowering the temperature, must be capable of protecting witnesses from unfairness and must be capable of respecting authority. My understanding is that the person the Liberals will be putting forward as chair is someone who has shown a pattern of personalisation, provocation and disregard for the rules that allow this place to function, including—and, in some cases, especially—in committees and to witnesses. I feel deeply uncomfortable about rewarding that conduct with greater procedural

authority. That is what it is about. It is the principle of the thing and then it is the integrity of the thing. I am not saying it is a “never, never”. I appreciate the genuine interest of this member who wishes to be chair, but, to take the temperature down, having petty fights with me throughout this week about correspondence really surprises me.

Ultimately, this is a committee in the middle of an inquiry that should be allowed to finish under the chair who began it. I honestly do not think that a member of this place should be losing a role that they are competently performing, at least for the next three months, as the price of following their conscience.

**MR PARTON**(Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (12.16): I know that there is an amendment coming from Mr Cocks, but I stand to defend a member of my team who has had some allegations made against him in that speech by Ms Cheyne, and I absolutely reject them. I am referring to a member of my team who is an assistant presiding officer of this place and conducts himself in that role in an exemplary manner, and he has chaired committees in the past without any problem or any complaint. I stand to defend that member and indicate that Mr Cocks is going to bring an amendment to the table, which I am obviously fully in support of.

**MR COCKS**(Murrumbidgee) (12.17): I move:

Omit all text after “as follows:”, substitute:

“(a) in the last column of the eighth row of the table, which describes the membership of the Standing Committee on Transport and City Services, omit:

‘3 Member committee

1 Liberal Member

1 Labor Member

1 Greens Member’

and substitute:

‘4 Member committee

Ms Leanne Castley MLA

1 Liberal Member

1 Labor Member

1 Greens Member’; and

(b) the Liberal Member to serve on the Standing Committee on Transport and City Services must be notified in writing to the Speaker within two hours following conclusion of the debate on this matter;

(2) agrees that the provisions of this resolution, so far as they are inconsistent with the standing orders, have effect notwithstanding anything contained in the standing orders.”.

I guess it is now important to explain what we saw when we saw the notice paper this week. I acknowledge that I did have a heads-up on the motion. It was a heads-up by about 10 minutes before it was submitted to the notice paper. It was surprising to me,

as the whip for the opposition, to see this come forward with zero consultation. At this point, I would like to acknowledge that the Manager of Government Business and I had a lengthy discussion yesterday. I appreciated her candour with me at that stage. She certainly indicated to me in that conversation that she did not see it as something controversial, nor did she see it as unreasonable. Clearly, from where we stood, we saw it differently. We perceived a range of things that the Manager of Government Business has alluded to. For today, it is probably reasonable to accept the position she has put forward.

At the same time, the arrangements for committees in the motion do not specify individual members or the individuals who chair those committees, nor is it, in fact, unusual to change committee membership in the course of an inquiry. If it was, it would be incredibly difficult to manage the process of changing committee memberships in a parliament of this size. Indeed, if I recall correctly, Ms Barry went on a committee not that long ago and stepped straight into a hearing the following week. It is difficult. When I was appointed to my first committee after entering this place, albeit as a member, not as the chair, I had to try to get to grips with a report that would be tabled the following week. It is not without precedent; it is not unusual. There is nothing unusual about the Liberal Party choosing the member to represent the Liberal Party on a committee. The arrangements for committee chairs are not specified in the standing orders, in terms of fairness or equal treatment. Indeed, all of these arrangements have been negotiated over time, and the motion that was presented to the Assembly and agreed by the Assembly set out which parties the different chairs would come from.

The way that we have navigated this space until this point in the Assembly has been very reasonable and quite collegiate, and I think it is important that we do our best to maintain that. I reject any suggestion that we, on this side of the chamber, are looking at penalising anyone. We are certainly not looking at preventing any Independent member being part of a committee in which they have an interest. I have no interest in that. I also reject any assertion that anyone that we would put up for a committee chair had any intention to act in any way but, as Mr Parton said, an exemplary manner. That is the Liberal Party's expectation: when we are serving on committees and when we are chairing committees, each of us will act with the highest standards. That is what we expect.

So I think it would be unreasonable to make changes to the agreed structure of which parties chair which committees, on the basis of one person's decision. I appreciate someone acting according to their conscience, but that does not mean that they have an entitlement to maintain a position that was allocated and agreed to go to the party which they previously represented.

**MISS NUTTALL** (Brindabella) (12.23): I rise to speak to Mr Cocks's amendment to Ms Cheyne's motion on committee configuration. This has been a fraught space where maths can only do so much to accommodate fairness in the diminishingly small pool of politicians here in the ACT Legislative Assembly. As the ACT Greens, we have employed the following guiding principles to make this call. I want to get them on the record.

The first is that any party or Independent is entitled to at least one position on any committee. This is a principle that has supported our current committee make-up since

the start of the term and ensures that, while in a perfect world a committee would look roughly like a smaller version of the Assembly, we should not deal out anybody who wants to be in the room. This is why we are supportive of Ms Castley remaining on the committee.

The second is that chairs should be determined based on the proportion of non-executive members in the chamber. This is how they were determined in the first instance. By that metric, if the Standing Committee on Transport and City Services were developed today, either the Liberals or the Greens would be due for chair. Given that the Liberals have previously held the position of chair, we are supportive of them retaining the position of chair. I would be the first to acknowledge that these are not the only principles out there. Indeed, many have been canvassed in this debate. But, in the interests of fairness and transparency, this is where we have landed.

A lever not available to us through this debate is the gender balance of chairs. It is difficult in a small parliament, but the chairing of committees is one of the ways we start to see the gender pay gap manifest and one of the ways we could eliminate it in our workplace. Right now, I believe there are three women chairing standing committees as opposed to five men chairing standing committees. Ultimately, this is a call for each party and each Independent to consider as they nominate their chairs, but, nevertheless, we should recognise that gender balance is an important point for fair chair distribution. The Greens will be supporting the Liberal amendment today.

**MS CARRICK**(Murrumbidgee) (12.25): Everyone has the right to leave a party, but this is not about that. The original resolution was that the chair of the transport committee is a Liberal. As I have thought about this, the right course has become clear to me. The chair sits with the party, not the person. Therefore, it sits with the Liberals right now, unless there is a change through a process that is undertaken to change it. We will always be in the middle of an inquiry, so I do not think it is about that. We need to be able to transition chairs. The members on the committee are across the issues, so I think we can transition chairs, although in this case it would be a new Liberal. They can get up to speed. Therefore, I will be supporting the Liberals retaining the chair of this committee at this time.

**MR EMERSON** (Kurrajong) (12.26): I, too, will be supporting the amendment put forward by Mr Cocks today. As members know, I have been engaging across the Assembly on this matter through the week. Seeing it early in the week, I could see how it was likely to unfold, and I think it essentially has unfolded in that way. I am trying to not speak to all of the political and other dynamics and so on, but instead my approach has been to focus on the principle, the mathematics, and come to a reasoned decision on that basis. That is why I am supporting the amendment from the Liberal Party.

Ms Cheyne has valiantly defended independence and its value, and I greatly appreciate that. We do not get many speeches like that in this place from members who are not independent. She spoke of removing a role. The fact is that the motion moved by Ms Cheyne is a motion that actually removes a role. Currently, the role has been allocated to the Liberals. As Ms Carrick pointed out, we would not have an amendment before us—we would not have this motion today—if we were removing a role. In fact, that is what the motion does, so I am comfortable with the amendment that has been brought forward.

Of course, Ms Castley should be on this committee and, from every conversation I have had, it sounds like members are keen for her to be on whichever committee she is keen to be on, which I think is really positive.

There were conversations about whether Ms Carrick should chair a committee. She has been deputy chair, I think, on four different committees and there might be an opportunity for chairing one as well.

Looking at the proportionality, to me it looks like, on the numbers, either the Canberra Liberals or the Greens should be chairing this committee to retain proportionality of committee chairs in relation to non-executive members in the Assembly. In my conversation with the Greens, they did not have an interest in chairing the committee, and that is why I have landed on retaining the chair for the Liberals, as agreed in the original resolution.

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH** (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (12.28): The government will not be supporting Mr Cocks’s amendment for the reasons that Ms Cheyne has outlined, in speaking to her original motion. I would note, in response to Mr Emerson’s comments just now, that if there was not a requirement for any kind of motion, Mr Cocks’s amendment would be irrelevant and everyone could have just voted against Ms Cheyne’s motion. There does need to be some change to the committee to enable Ms Castley to become a member of the committee. There does need to be a motion in this place to address this issue.

Ms Cheyne’s motion simply seeks to maintain the current chair of a committee that has an important inquiry in flight, until all parties and members have the opportunity to fully consider committee membership between now and the next sitting in September.

This has been a tumultuous time in the Assembly. We have seen the resignation of a long-standing member and now a process where the Greens will be selecting a new leader. We have also seen a member leave the Liberals to go to the crossbench. This has changed the maths, and it may change the distribution of interests among Greens members in this place as well.

So, I understand—and I think others have alluded to this—that there has been some suspicion of some kind of a deal. I have heard it from outside of this place; a proliferation of conspiracy theories, and that people have been spreading rumours about some kind of deal. Certainly, as a member of the Labor caucus, I can say with 100 per cent certainty that this is not the case. This is an example of Ms Cheyne, as the manager of government business, seeking to support the smooth operation of the Assembly and its committees in a time of change.

Now, Mr Assistant Speaker, I know that it is not always easy, but I would strongly encourage everyone in considering this—and I know that, unfortunately, members of the crossbench and the Greens have come to a position on this matter—to come to this from a starting point of assuming good intent. It is not always easy in this place. That is why I have a note on my own whiteboard saying, “assume good intent”—because it is very easy not to do so. And it has been a hard week. It is a hard week to do that; a

week where the Canberra Liberals have lost a member to the crossbench; where there has been a motion to censure the Deputy Chief Minister; and a series of—let's face it—pretty challenging exchanges between members across the chamber, and I am not only talking about two members in that case.

But sometimes a sensible compromise is just that: a short-term solution that allows everyone to work through the changes that are occurring in this place. But the crossbench, in particular, I would have thought, could have seen it in that light.

The motion was placed on the notice paper in good time and following considerable thought and some consultation. To Mr Cocks's point about notice, this has all happened very fast: two short weeks, two long weekends, and the need to lodge a motion on Tuesday morning to get it onto the notice paper so that it could be considered. And Ms Cheyne has done that in her role as manager of government business, taking responsibility for changes she knew would have to be considered in some way by this place. It is standard practice in this place that, in these circumstances, parties negotiate on matters that appear on the notice paper before they are debated. And I know Mr Cocks acknowledged that those conversations have since occurred.

I want to say, from a Labor perspective, it has been absolutely clear within the Labor caucus that Ms Cheyne has genuinely sought to engage with other parties to find an agreed path forward on this matter. I am sorry that this has not been able to occur.

The reality is that the numbers in this place have changed. The maths governing committee chairs and membership has changed. And as Mr Emerson has indicated, it is not clear—it is actually not clear—what the result of this should be in the longer term. The Greens are going through a leadership process that may ultimately affect the distribution of portfolios amongst themselves and the distribution of responsibilities amongst themselves.

From my perspective and from Labor's perspective, maintaining the current chairing arrangements for three months just logically made sense. The first draft of a report is the chair's draft. They work with the secretariat. I have not been on a committee—I have not been on the backbench—but I have talked to our backbenchers, and the first draft is the responsibility of the chair, working with the committee secretariat. Ms Tough is nodding. And Ms Castley is the chair.

Putting somebody else into that role for an inquiry that commenced in September, where she has taken a strong personal interest in these matters, is going to be disruptive to the continuity of that inquiry. I accept the points that have been made about changing committee membership, and that people come on and off committees all the time, but changing a chair is a big deal in terms of continuity of an inquiry and relationship with the secretariat.

So, I am really disappointed with the members of the crossbench, and particularly the Greens. Miss Nuttall made a comment about the gender distribution across chairing arrangements and, you know, another element of concern. I must admit, I had not even looked, but knowing that—having looked at that, having looked at the maths and knowing it had changed—I am really disappointed; really disappointed that the Greens and the crossbench just could not support what was put forward in good faith as a

sensible, short-term compromise while everybody worked through what the future arrangements for committees would look like from September.

**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) (12.35): I will just speak very briefly to reiterate what Minister Stephen-Smith said, and to say that, when Minister Cheyne brought this motion to our caucus as our manager of government business, it seemed very uncontroversial and straightforward, really, to just have the committee remain in the same make-up until September, when there would be a full review.

As Minister Stephen-Smith has stated, there has been significant flux in the Assembly and change over the past week or two and it remains our position that it would be, for the continuity of the committee and the inquiry, a reasonable suggestion to see that Ms Castley remain the chair until September. So, yes, it is disappointing to see the views in the chamber. And I just wanted to thank Ms Cheyne for bringing this to the chamber today.

**MS CASTLEY** (Yerrabi) (12.36): I think all the points that I have written here in my speech have been covered. I would like to add that it is a new Assembly, and it is crystal clear that there are two lots of maths going on, lots of backdoor deals trying to hurry stuff through, and the proposal of a review by September is a very sensible one.

I love the committee I am on. I am totally invested in the inquiry that we are having, and I am enjoying every minute of it, and I am deeply, deeply disappointed that I will not get to see this inquiry through as chair.

I will say, I am honoured to have a seat in this place and honoured to still have a role in the committee. Obviously, that is what has been arranged. I believe someone did speak for me and say that I am able to be on any committee I want to. No one asked me what I would like. They have just shunted me into just to being here as a member of the committee; it is not okay to be the chair, not continuing to be the chair. That is fine; I am not there for the job, the role, the money. I am invested in the municipal services in the ACT and the ongoing inquiries that we have discussed that are on the ramp, in the future.

And so, I thank the manager of government business for bringing this forward. That is her role. I appreciate everybody's contributions today and for those that have stuck up for the sensible approach of letting things lie till we can have an open conversation—as I said, not a backdoor conversation.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank my committee members and the secretariat. I could not have done what I have done as chair of this committee without them. They are an instrumental, wonderful, wonderful bunch of people that I have had the opportunity of working with, and I look forward to continuing to do so.

I appreciate everybody doing their best to try and maintain status quo. Unfortunately, we have not been able to do that today.

**MR COCKS** (Murrumbidgee) (12.39), by leave: I just thought it very important to clarify two points. The first is on gender balance of chairs, and we had this discussion with the Greens earlier today. I would make the point, and I think it should be on the record, that indeed the Liberals did make a change to maintain, as best we could, some degree of gender balance, with me stepping down from the integrity commission committee and Ms Lee stepping up into that role.

I would like to apologise to Ms Castley if she has been locked out of conversations. It was my understanding and my assumption that she had been consulted on whether this was the committee that she wished to be on.

**Ms Castley:** Not thoroughly enough to make decisions on how the Assembly looks in the future.

**MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER:** Ms Castley.

**MR COCKS:** Should she wish to be on a different committee and wishes to move an amendment, that would be entirely appropriate and at the same time, if in future she wishes to do so, it should absolutely be something that should be considered. We should not be just locking people into committees if that is not their preference.

Otherwise, I wanted to thank those in the chamber for what has largely been a productive discussion, noting that there are a couple of different ways to do the maths on this and clearly, two of us have got to different positions on what that maths looks like. Thank you, Mr Assistant Speaker.

**MR EMERSON** (Kurrajong) (12.40), by leave: I just want to respond quickly to a couple of the remarks. Minister Stephen-Smith referenced the need to assume good intent. I would encourage the minister to review the Hansard and look at the comments from the crossbench. I think you will find that no one reflected on the manner in which Ms Cheyne had brought the motion. I believe those remarks were made from the Liberal Party and that the crossbench, instead, referenced the evidence that was used to make the decision.

Ms Stephen-Smith spoke to the potential need for a review on the basis of changes to the composition of the Assembly, including the Greens. I just wanted to make clear that I asked the Greens if that was something that they felt necessary. They said it was not. I spoke also with the Canberra Liberals on whether they felt that was necessary. They also said that it was not. I did also speak with Ms Castley about whether she wished to be on other committees as well, and I understood that she did not. Of course, I also understood that she wished to chair the committee that she was on, but that was my understanding of our conversation, and I am happy to have that corrected if anyone feels that is inaccurate.

Ms Castley also commented that someone had spoken for her in saying she could be on any committee she would like. I would encourage her also to read the Hansard. I believe what I had said was that in my conversations with other members, they indicated they felt Ms Castley could be on whichever committees she liked, which is different from putting words in your mouth, which I hope not to do in my time in this place, on the crossbench with you.

Amendment agreed to.

Original question, as amended resolved in the affirmative.

## **Budget management system—order to table documents**

**MR COCKS** (Murrumbidgee) (12.42): I move:

That:

- (1) in accordance with standing order 213A, the Assembly orders the Treasurer to provide the Assembly with a document or documents, drawn from or produced using information held in the ACT Government's Budget Management System, setting out a complete list of all Budget measures that currently have funding attached to them;
- (2) the document or documents must be provided in an accessible electronic format, including a machine-readable spreadsheet, and must include for each Budget measure:
  - (a) the title of the measure;
  - (b) the relevant directorate or agency;
  - (c) whether the measure relates to expenses, capital, revenue, savings, offsets or another category;
  - (d) the Budget, Budget Review, appropriation bill, or other Budget process in which the measure was first introduced;
  - (e) whether the measure is ongoing or non-ongoing;
  - (f) if the measure is non-ongoing, the financial year in which funding for the measure is scheduled to end; and
  - (g) the amount of funding currently allocated to the measure in the current Budget and each year of the forward estimates period; and
- (3) for the purposes of this order:
  - (a) "Budget measure" includes any measure, initiative, commitment, revenue measure, capital measure, expense measure, program measure, election commitment or other funded decision recorded in the Budget Management System;
  - (b) "currently have funding attached" means measures for which funding is allocated, reserved, approved, appropriated, transferred, reprofiled or otherwise recorded in the Budget Management System for the current financial year or any year of the forward estimates;
  - (c) "funding" includes controlled recurrent payments, territorial payments, capital injections, capital works funding, expenses on behalf of the Territory, own-source revenue impacts, administered items, savings, offsets and any other financial allocation recorded against a measure; and
  - (d) the list is to be provided at the most disaggregated measure level available in the Budget Management System and must not be provided only as aggregated directorate, portfolio or output-class totals.

I will not speak for long on this. This is a very straightforward motion seeking additional information to enable the Assembly to properly scrutinise the financial position and commitments of the government. The information being asked for goes to the heart of one of the observations and recommendations of Mr Eslake in his recent work: that there are often measures introduced by the government which are not ongoing measures; measures which do not have funding committed into the future and which are likely to have new measures replace them or to be extended; and that this makes it incredibly difficult at times for the Assembly to understand exactly what the position is going to look like in those forward estimates outcomes.

The intent was to understand the full scope of the budget, measure by measure, and all of the measures that have fed into the budget over time. I think that would be a prudent way for us to be able to understand exactly what is going on.

What was intended when those measures were introduced? Are they still being achieved? I think it is incredibly important information as we head into a scrutiny process with the estimates committee as well as in the context of the fiscal sustainability.

I did not seek to do something which would be incredibly difficult, but I will note that, in my conversations with the government, it seems that getting a list of what I thought was basic information may indeed prove to be exactly that. So, I will acknowledge that there is an amendment to come from Mr Steel and that it has been the subject of quite a bit of discussion between our offices. I think we have landed on a position which should, hopefully, get both committees the information they need—early. And we will continue discussions around trying to find a way to get the remainder of the information which I think this place should be able to scrutinise, in the future.

**MR STEEL** (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage and Minister for Transport) (12.45): I would like to thank Mr Cocks and Ms Clay and their teams for their practical discussions with my office yesterday, on how we can best deliver on the intent of this motion. I understand and respect Mr Cocks's desire to get under the hood of the budget and find every possible concern that he might have, which is valid for his role in providing scrutiny and oversight of the territory's finances.

I also note that Mr Cocks recognises that the team in ACT Treasury is incredibly small and they have just all worked through two very long weekends, and cannot yet put pens down for the next few weeks to catch a break as they are preparing for the June quarter financial statements and need to undertake end-of-financial-year consolidation and reporting. So, there has been a genuine discussion about making sure that they are safe in their workplace and have a level of wellbeing over the next couple of weeks.

This is the type of information that is transparently published in each budget and across statements, but I acknowledge that it is not in the form that Mr Cocks's original motion would have us present it in. The advice I have received from Treasury is that to do so in the original form of the motion would have been incredibly labour intensive and taken a period of months to compile.

I would also like to be clear that an initiative might not be funded ongoing, for any number of reasons. It might be a pilot program or a specific time-limited project; it

might be subject to future negotiations with the commonwealth on funding; it might be subject to future business case consideration. As a government, we consider each of these things in each budget, and it is prudent budget management to fund initiatives only for the time that they should be funded for—not just ongoing in every circumstance. There may be many things that occur when an initiative is ceasing: a new approach might be taken, and that might be following an evaluation and review; the activity may cease; or the activity may no longer require initiative funding.

Our government is committed to transparency and to an honest and open discourse about the territory's finances. We hope that the Assembly considers the estimates, annual report hearings, public accounts committee hearings and deliberations, and the fiscal sustainability and Financial Management Act select committees in their totality of the existing available scrutiny—but also their cumulative, combined effect on the workload of ACT Treasury staff in responding to them as well as undertaking the core business of government.

So, the amendment that I have circulated in my name, which is the one that is marked as revised amendment number 2, seeks to deliver on the intent of the original motion and seeks to extend the timeframe for providing the information that Mr Cocks is seeking. We are happy to provide it; it will just require a little bit more time. I think we can provide it in a way that delivers what the Assembly is looking for, and will provide greater transparency about the government's initiatives. Thank you.

I move:

Omit all text in paragraphs (1), (2) and (3), substitute:

- (1) in accordance with standing order 213A, the Assembly orders the Treasurer to provide the Assembly with a document or documents, listing Budget initiatives with time limited funding currently allocated;
- (2) the document or documents must be provided in an accessible electronic format, including a machine-readable spreadsheet, and must include for each Budget initiative:
  - (a) the title of the Budget initiative;
  - (b) the relevant directorate or agency;
  - (c) whether the initiative relates to expenses, capital or revenue;
  - (d) the Budget process in which the initiative was first introduced; and
  - (e) the amount of funding currently allocated to the initiative in the current Budget and each year of the forward estimates period;
- (3) for the purpose of this order:
  - (a) 'Budget initiative' includes any measure, initiative, commitment, revenue measure, capital measure, expense measure, program measure, election commitment or other funded decision recorded in the Budget Management System;
  - (b) 'Budget process' means Budget, Budget Review, appropriation bill, or other Budget process which the measure was first introduced; and
  - (c) the list is to be provided at the most disaggregated measure initiative level available in the Budget Management System and must not be

provided only as aggregated directorate, portfolio or output-class totals;  
and

- (4) notwithstanding the provisions of standing order 213A, the document or documents are to be provided within 30 calendar days.

**MS CLAY** (Ginninderra) (12.49): The ability for crossbench and opposition MLAs to provide proper scrutiny of the budget is crucial. We can only do this if we are able to clearly see how resources are being allocated and for what items. Right now, it is near impossible to track funding for certain government programs, particularly when they change their name or scope over time, even if the program is delivering essentially the same thing.

That is why the Greens welcome Mr Cocks's order for production of documents, which will bring greater transparency to the budget process and better enable scrutiny through the 2026-27 estimates process, which commences in July. While the documents will not be ready in time for the community day hearings—which is a shame—they will be ready for the bulk of the hearings. We also understand that Treasury public servants have worked hard on this budget and, while we would like to be able to see these documents sooner, we appreciate they take time to compile, and we want this to be manageable within normal working hours.

We also really appreciate the fact that the opposition and the government have come together and run a really sensible negotiation to come up with a good compromise on what is actually needed, and how can that be feasibly provided by some very hardworking public servants at the moment. We are therefore happy to support the Treasurer's, amendment which we understand is a good compromise position on this issue.

Amendment agreed to.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

## **Legal Affairs—Standing Committee Reference**

Motion (by **Ms Barry**, by leave) agreed to:

That notwithstanding Standing Order 174(d), if the Standing Committee on Legal Affairs resolves to conduct an inquiry into the Emergencies Amendment Bill 2026 the reporting date be extended to 21 October 2026.

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

Motion (by **Ms Lee**, by leave) agreed to:

That, notwithstanding Standing Order 174(d), if the Standing Committee on the Integrity Commission and Statutory Office Holders resolves to conduct an inquiry into the Electoral (Gambling Industry) Amendment Bill 2026 the reporting date

be extended to 28 October 2026.

## **Environment and Planning—Standing Committee Reference**

**MS CLAY** (Ginninderra) (12.53): I seek leave to move a motion concerning the referral of the Urban Forest and Planning Legislation Amendment Bill 2026 to committee.

Leave not granted.

**Sitting suspended from 12.54 to 2.00 pm**

## **Ministerial Arrangements**

**MR BARR** (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism and Trade) (2.00): Minister Berry is away from question time today for personal reasons. For question time, Minister Pettersson will take questions in the Homes, Homelessness and New Suburbs portfolios; Minister Stephen-Smith will take questions in the Education and Early Childhood Education portfolios; and Minister Cheyne will assist in the Sport and Recreation portfolios.

## **Questions without notice City Police Station—condition**

**MR PARTON:** My question is to the Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services.

Minister, the government has announced plans for a new City Police Station and ACT Policing Headquarters. However, your own answer to questions on notice identified repeated policy facility failures, including flooding, sewage incursions and water ingress at the City Police Station. Those new facilities may still be years away. Do you believe that the budget announced this week makes sufficient provision for remediation works that will stop a repeat of the long list of problems that you detailed on notice?

**DR PATERSON:** Yes, I do. There is an ongoing budget that is used to remediate some of the issues that Mr Parton has outlined. And that is why we have been progressing procurement for a new City Police Station and headquarters, because we want to see ACT Policing in new facilities as soon as possible.

**MR PARTON:** Minister, do you consider City Police Station to be currently fit for purpose for ACT Policing officers, and do those policing officers feel that it is fit for purpose?

**DR PATERSON:** I feel that it is a station that has been fit for purpose in its time, and at that at this time we recognise that police needs have evolved and changed, and the number of staff at City Police Station has now increased significantly. How we understand best practice of a watch house has changed significantly. So that is why we have budgeted for and are progressing procurement for a new City Police Station and headquarters.

**Mr Parton:** A point of order on relevance: the question was very specifically whether

the minister considers the City Police Station to be currently fit for purpose, and I am not sure that the minister has answered the question.

**MR SPEAKER:** I do not think she was precise, Mr Parton, but I think she was relevant to the question, so there is no point of order.

**MS LEE:** Minister, what interim remediation works will be undertaken to ensure police are not left working in a deteriorating facility while the new station and headquarters are developed?

**DR PATERSON:** There are further works that have been funded for particular stations around Canberra to upgrade, particularly, heating and cooling systems. There is funding in the budget to upgrade armouries at two of the police stations in Canberra. There are continued works to see that these stations are functioning to the best of their ability. There is funding for those works, and as I said, we are very committed to progressing the procurement process for a new City Police Station and headquarters.

### **Budget—revenue**

**MR COCKS:** My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, your budget referred to developments in the Middle East 21 times.

**Mr Parton:** How many?

**MR COCKS:** Twenty-one times. Treasurer, you have blamed events in the Middle East for anything from softer investment returns and poorer economic uncertainty to lower payroll tax revenue. You have blamed lower payroll tax revenue on events in the Middle East. Treasurer, how much of the ACT's payroll tax revenue comes from the Middle East?

**MR STEEL:** I thank the member for his question. Of course, the war in the Middle East has had an impact on the ACT economy. Of course, it has, because it has seen a significant increase in fuel prices, and it has seen prices escalate right across other goods in the economy as well. That has had an impact on the territory's budget. It has had an impact on households and businesses. Everyone is alive to that fact.

We are still in a period of uncertainty. Every single state and territory Treasurer, as they hand down their budgets—including Queensland's; I was reading David Janetzki's comments about the war today in the *Financial Review*—is recognising the fact that this has had a big impact. So, yes, it does affect the ACT's budget, and that is outlined in the budget.

Of course, it forms part of the forecasts that Treasury has made, not just in relation to the economic parameters but in relation to budget expenditure. There is direct budget expenditure on things like increased fuel, diesel, particularly in Transport Canberra operations. The cost of other products has gone up as well, and that has affected a range of different government agencies. It has also affected the range of decisions that the government can take during this period of time, including on payroll tax, recognising that there were already changes flowing through that were going to start from 1 July and that were announced in the last budget. We could not take further decisions to

implement the recommendations put forward by Mr Eslake in his report, to take additional payroll tax measures. That was a decision not to take a decision in this budget, to support businesses during this uncertain time.

**MR COCKS:** Treasurer, have you considered that weaker payroll tax revenue might reflect the consequences of your own tax policies, rather than events occurring thousands of kilometres away in the Middle East?

**MR STEEL:** Of course, the forecasts from Treasury take into account all economic factors. There is a range of different things occurring both locally and globally that affect the ACT's economy. One of the local things that is happening is the insourcing agenda of the federal government. That has impacted on payroll tax receipts, as we see the kind of work that consultants would otherwise have done being insourced and undertaken within the federal government. We have been doing some of that, too. In fact, we have a measure in the budget to reduce the use of consultants, to achieve savings in the budget—a responsible decision that we have made on the expenditure side of the budget in this year.

Yes, there are a range of factors that contribute to the economic circumstances that we face, and the revenue that the ACT government receives.

**MR PARTON:** Treasurer, why is the government slugging more and smaller businesses with increased payroll tax rates, rather than pursuing reforms that encourage employment growth to expand the tax base?

**MR STEEL:** I thank the member for his question. As I said, we did not make a decision to implement the recommendations by Saul Eslake in his report, partially because the report came down late, but also because the timing was not right, and we had to be measured and balanced in our decisions in this budget, recognising the constraints on the economy and business. We had already made decisions in the last budget—tough decisions on revenue and expenditure, some of which are still being implemented, including the change that we made to broaden the base of payroll tax for businesses with a payroll of over \$1.75 million. But we also made the decision to cut the rate that they were paying in payroll tax, which is exactly in line with what Mr Eslake had recommended.

### **Macquarie swimming pool—site lease**

**MS CLAY:** My question is to the Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development. The first mortgagee is intending to sell the Big Splash site. Access Canberra has imposed conditions on re-opening the pool by 1 November 2026. I presume these conditions would be included with the sales documents. What is the full set of conditions imposed by Access Canberra, and can you table a copy?

**MR STEEL:** I thank the member for her question. I think they have published a statement of the reasons for their decision, and obviously the commitment has been made to open the pool in November. I am not aware of any decision that Access Canberra has taken to step back from that commitment. They are still going to very closely monitor the implementation of that. It is positive to see Purdon, on behalf of the mortgagee, making a statement that they still intend to follow through with the

commitment to open the pool in November.

Nothing has changed in terms of the government's position. We want to see the pool open as soon as possible. We want to see the full range of aquatic facilities being provided. It is positive, with today's announcement, that it appears that the slides will not be demolished. In fact, they will be fenced off to allow the sale to proceed and then see the outcomes achieved from the sale.

Again, the government has not ruled out any options in relation to Big Splash. We continue to have conversations outside of and separate to the regulatory process led by Access Canberra—between the mortgagee and officials—to make sure that we understand where they are up to in the process and that they are continuing steps towards opening the pool. We want to see a good outcome for the community. I hope that the announcement today will see the sale of this site to someone who can operate the full range of aquatic facilities that the community want and have enjoyed over the past few decades.

**MS CLAY:** Minister, in the event those conditions are not complied with, what compliance action is available to Access Canberra?

**MR STEEL:** There are a range of penalties available under the current Planning Act and other steps that they can take. We have committed to review the range of enforcement powers available to Access Canberra to make sure that there is compliance with leases. That was a commitment that we made at the election, and we will be undertaking that work over the next year to see what could be improved within the Planning Act to give the community greater confidence that there is a range of powers for Access Canberra to use, and to make sure that they have the flexibility to choose an appropriate mechanism to enforce leases, depending on the circumstances that they face.

Ultimately, we want to see the lessee—whoever that may be in the future—bring this site back to recreational use for the community. The government continues to be clear that we have no intention whatsoever to rezone this site. We want it to remain for restricted recreational use. That will continue on the site. We just need someone who can take it over and provide the long-term commitment that the community wants to see for an aquatic facility delivered on the site. In the meantime, Access Canberra will be holding the lessee to account in relation to opening the pool from November.

**MR BRADDOCK:** Minister, when will the internal review into compliance actions by Access Canberra be completed? And do you commit to releasing a statement on the outcomes of that review?

**MR STEEL:** It is not a review into their compliance activity; it is a review into the suite of powers under the Planning Act that Access Canberra has, acting as a delegate on behalf of the independent Territory Planning Authority and the Chief Planner. We expect that to be completed over the next year. It may require some legislative change being brought forward to the Legislative Assembly. That will be an opportunity for the community to engage and members of the Assembly to engage with that process as well.

**Ms Clay:** I believe the minister may have misunderstood the question. The question was about the internal review being conducted by Access Canberra into decisions about Big Splash. We understand that at the moment there is an internal review. We would be happy for the minister to take that on notice.

**MR STEEL:** I am happy to take that on notice to find out whether there is some more information that I can provide to the Assembly.

### **Woods Reserve campground—domestic animals**

**MS CASTLEY:** Mr Speaker, my question is to the Minister for City and Government Services. I understand the government has decided to exclude family pets from the Woods Reserve campground when it reopens later this year. Could the minister please confirm if this is accurate and why this decision has been taken?

**MS CHEYNE:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. I believe that this is part of the overall upgrades for Woods Reserve. But I think the best thing that I can do in in this moment is to take the question on notice and to come back with some more detail for Ms Castley. I might be able to do it by the end of question time.

**MS CASTLEY:** Could the minister also confirm if this exclusion would mean that there is only one remaining pet-friendly campground in the ACT, Blue Range, which has no waterways for swimming or cooling off on summer camping trips?

**MS CHEYNE:** I will also take that on notice. I would note that a number of our campgrounds are in a National Park and that means that there are limitations on what non-native animals can be present, even if they are under some level of human control. But let me confirm that for Ms Castley, and I will do my best to respond at the end of question time.

**MR EMERSON:** Minister, will the government commit to delivering more pet-friendly campsites in the ACT?

**MS CHEYNE:** I think that is asking me to announce policy, Mr Speaker. While I would love to, I will not.

### **ACT Policing—professional standards investigations**

**MR EMERSON:** My question is for the minister for police. Minister, after officers wrongfully apprehended an Aboriginal teenager at gunpoint on a bus in November last year, ACT Policing initiated a Professional Standards Command investigation. During annual reports hearings in November, more than six months ago, when asked about the investigation, the Chief Police Officer said:

Certainly, with our Professional Standards Command, we have talked about doing that as quickly as possible.

I understand this investigation was expected to take six to eight weeks. On ABC Radio this week, the Chief Police Officer indicated the investigation is still ongoing and a resolution is expected soon.

Minister, why has the internal investigation into this incident been delayed for so long? Do you accept that this extended delay risks further damaging trust between police and the First Nations community?

**DR PATERSON:** I thank the member for the question. The investigation has not been delayed, it is just a complex investigation. As the member will know, the police have a PRS investigation and the Ombudsman also has an investigation ongoing, and I look forward to the outcomes of both of those investigations.

**MR EMERSON:** Minister, what support has been offered to the young person who is subject to this wrongful apprehension and to his family and the broader First Nations community while this investigation is still ongoing?

**DR PATERSON:** There have been supports made available to the young person and his family by ACT Policing. ACT police have worked as closely as they can with community members and those who are supporting the family as well as with the Elected Body as this process continues.

**MS CARRICK:** Minister, is change needed to ACT Policing's internal investigations processes given the unacceptable amount of time this investigation has taken?

**DR PATERSON:** No, I do not believe so. The PRS is a robust process that the Australian Federal Police undertake when they investigate police conduct. It is unfortunate that it has taken a long time but, as I said, it is quite a complex investigation.

### **Access Canberra—Woden shopfront**

**MS CARRICK:** My question is to the minister for city services. Minister, in the recent budget it was announced that the Access Canberra shopfront in Woden will be relocated to the Woden library, as part of a proposed co-location model. This raises concerns about the impact on library services, accessibility for residents, and the broader rationale and transparency of the decision-making process. Minister, will the co-location of Access Canberra with the Woden library result in any loss of meeting room capacity or any other library service? If so, how will these be replaced? And will there still be an Access Canberra presence in the Cosmopolitan building or will those jobs be lost to Woden?

**MS CHEYNE:** That is a lot of questions, Mr Speaker. I will do my best to answer.

In terms of the overall footprint makeup of Woden library, I will take that on notice and come back with the detail for Ms Carrick. I think it is in the early stages but let me see what I can get for her.

Secondly, on the Cosmopolitan building, my understanding is that there would not be an Access Canberra presence in there but that does not mean any job loss. They would instead be working in the Woden library, which we understand to be a good outcome because it allows people to be using both services in proximity—very similarly to Belconnen.

**MS CARRICK:** Minister, what consideration has been given to accessibility for Canberrans with limited mobility, noting that the Woden library is significantly further from the Woden bus interchange and that there are no public transport services on the western side of the town centre?

**MS CHEYNE:** I will take that on notice.

**MR EMERSON:** Minister, what analysis informed the decision to co-locate services in Woden? Why was Woden selected over other town or group centres? Will this analysis be made public?

**MS CHEYNE:** I will take that on notice just to make sure I respond as comprehensively as possible. I would note that there will be plenty of opportunity in estimates to ask these questions, too. One of the considerations is the overall footprint in the Cosmopolitan building and the lease timing around that. But let me come back to the Assembly with a detailed answer—if not before estimates, by estimates, through estimates, or after.

### **Budget—frontline services**

**MS TOUGH:** My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, how does the 2026-27 ACT budget invest in more and better services for our growing city?

**MR STEEL:** I thank Ms Tough for her question. The 2026-27 budget has a distinct and important focus on better frontline and community services, and that is why the budget has invested over \$231 million in public health and the community-based health services and workforce. This includes a significant investment to operate a new acute palliative care unit at the Canberra Hospital, which will be complete later this year. And the budget also supports funding to expand the Canberra Hospital paediatric fracture clinic, increase lung cancer specialist services and support, grow and retain our health workforce, with a \$14.1 million investment to continue junior medical officer wellbeing and workforce initiatives.

Mr Speaker, this will be supported by the \$1.3 billion investment that we are making in a new north-side hospital through the budget, a significant piece of health infrastructure that will include a new state-of-the-art emergency department, co-designed birth centre and more than 200 inpatient beds. Labor will always invest in our public hospitals and our public health system to support the health and wellbeing of our community.

**MS TOUGH:** Treasurer, what other frontline services are supported through investments in this budget?

**MR STEEL:** The budget also invests in more firefighters and paramedics. Supporting these critical workforces is a priority for our government. More paramedics will respond to growing demand as our city grows and ensure the Ambulance Service remains responsive. The new Molonglo Emergency Services Station will be supported by additional fire crews to support continued responsiveness, and the government will also support the upgrade and replacement of vehicles and equipment across the ESA.

The budget is also making additional investments to strengthen additional prosecution

services, with \$18.9 million of investment to fund 24 new and permanent positions, including additional prosecutors and witness assistance officers.

Mr Speaker, the budget also provides further investments to support frontline services in mowing, horticultural services, street sweeping and more funding to support bushfire risk reduction in our nature reserves and parks. This budget continues our government's record of supporting the frontline services that Canberrans rely on.

**MR WERNER-GIBBINGS:** Treasurer, how will the government partner with the community sector to support essential community services?

**MR STEEL:** I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for his supplementary. The community sector is a vital and invaluable partner for government in delivering frontline community services, and I am pleased that the 2026-27 budget provides ongoing support for our community sector across a range of different priority areas. The budget provides over \$44 million to strengthen funding for frontline domestic, family and sexual violence, and I am very proud that the budget provides ongoing and uplifted funding to a range of critical providers and supports, including those provided by DVCS, the Canberra Rape Crisis Centre and EveryMan.

The budget also has a strong focus on frontline homelessness services, with an investment of at least \$16 million, recognising the importance of these frontline services and recognising the demand that they are facing—services funded like Samaritan House, Roadhouse, Blue Door, and Our Place Braddon. Supporting our community sector is a priority for the government, and the budget provides funding for a permanent uplift in funding to the community sector organisations to ensure that they can plan for the future, retain staff, provide high quality services and respond to demand in key areas. These investments are part of a responsible and responsive budget that delivers for Canberrans.

### **Thriving Kids—federal government funding**

**MISS NUTTALL:** My question is to the Minister for Disability, Carers and Community Services.

Minister, funding for Thriving Kids has been promised to be funded 50 per cent by the commonwealth and 50 per cent by the states and territories. Given our bilateral agreement states that we have agreed to spend \$37.3 million on Thriving Kids over the forward estimates, while the commonwealth is only contributing \$26.1 million, is the fifty-fifty split actually true?

**MS ORR:** The short answer is yes, it is a fifty-fifty split. The difference in the two figures that Miss Nuttall has referenced is that the commonwealth has provided a portion of its fifty-fifty split to states and territories, so the higher amount in the ACT is reflected in that. The easiest way to explain it is that, yes, our 50 per cent is reflected there. The commonwealth will be spending part of their 50 per cent on services that they deliver, that are nationally consistent, and the remainder has come to us, which is the other amount that Miss Nuttall has quoted.

**MISS NUTTALL:** Minister, where in the budget papers is the \$5 million in federal

funding that is anticipated this year, and can the minister confirm that we will be receiving it?

**MS ORR:** I will take the detail of the question, about where it is in the budget papers, on notice, because I do not have the budget papers in front of me, so I cannot point Miss Nuttall to that.

**MS CLAY:** Minister, when will you release the ACT's Thriving Kids implementation plan?

**MS ORR:** The implementation plan is an agreement between the federal and state and territory governments as to how it will be implemented. As I have said previously in this place, I will need to take on notice whether that will be publicly released or not. I do not believe that has been confirmed at this time, or since the last time it came up for discussion. We have provided publicly information around what the components of Thriving Kids will be, how we will look to progressively roll that out and how we will be consulting on the finer details of the scheme. That information is still there, and it is consistent with everything that you would expect within the implementation plan.

Mr Speaker, with your indulgence, Miss Nuttall had a second part to her question, which was about the \$5 million becoming available this year. My understanding and the advice to me is that once all the agreements have been signed and everyone is content that they are being complied with, the funding will be made available.

### **Levies and taxation—rates**

**MR COCKS:** My question is to the Treasurer.

Treasurer, before the budget, your government announced that the \$100 health levy was going to be scrapped, but, despite this, the budget figures show that, while removing the levy will reduce revenue by \$21.4 million, rates revenue will actually increase by \$28 million. That means that residents will be worse off overall. Was the abolition of the levy a genuine tax cut or just rebranding how the government collects additional revenue?

**MR STEEL:** I thank the member for his question. No, what it is is a recognition of the extra funding coming from the commonwealth as part of a new five-year National Health Reform Agreement. Because of the advocacy of the Minister for Health and the Chief Minister, we are receiving additional moneys that were not forecast in last year's budget. We have now reached agreement and we have extra funding of \$75 million in 2026-27, recognising the extra cost of delivering healthcare services in a small jurisdiction like the ACT. We have been able to remove the health levy because we are receiving a fairer share of funding from the commonwealth. That means that average rates bills will only go up by an average of five per cent. This is a reasonable increase, particularly at a time when we know that households are under pressure.

As a result of the health levy being removed from household rates bills, 27,000 households will receive a rates bill cut. At the same time as we are making cuts to stamp duty and we are making cuts to the additional indexation that was otherwise going to come in for motor vehicle registration from 1 July, we are also cutting the health levy,

benefiting thousands of households across the territory. But we are also making sure that our rates system continues to provide a sustainable level of revenue to fund the community services that we are funding in the budget, the frontline services that we are funding in the budget, and the new housing that we are funding in the budget as well.

**MR COCKS:** Treasurer, do you deny that Canberrans are collectively paying more under this budget than they were paying under the health levy?

**MR STEEL:** I just said that 27,000 households will receive a rates bill cut as a result of abolishing the health levy. The way that our rates system is formulated means it is progressive—very highly progressive. The households that have more valuable land—land that has gone up higher in value relative to other blocks in Canberra—will pay more in rates compared to those who own blocks that are worth relatively less, on average, over five years. That is a fair system. It is a system that still allows us to provide a contribution to the cost of delivering healthcare services and education to children across the ACT as well as an investment in this budget in frontline services, for new paramedics and new firefighters, and community services that support the most vulnerable people.

**Mr Cocks:** Mr Speaker, on a point of order, under 118AA: the question was actually about the collective amount of payments from Canberrans for rates, not the structure of the rate system and whether rates were higher than when the health levy was in place.

**MR SPEAKER:** Basically you asked him to deny—

**MR STEEL:** I already said it was going up by five per cent, on average, so, yes, that would be higher. It would be higher by about five per cent.

**MR SPEAKER:** You asked him to deny something, Mr Cocks, and he is not going to give you a yes or no answer. He was comprehensive in his answer and responsive. There is no point of order. A supplementary, Mr Cain.

**MR CAIN:** Treasurer, why did the government spin this change as tax relief when Canberrans will be paying record amounts in rates and rental taxes?

**MR STEEL:** I thank the member for his question. We have been very transparent that we have abolished the health levy, but rates go up every year. At every single budget, rates go up. What we have seen in the first half of this calendar year is because of the war in the Middle East. Inflation has gone up substantially, and that is reflected in the budget, in the economic parameters for this financial year. We have seen the CPI go up to 4¾ per cent, and that has impacted the cost of delivering services by government, just as much as it has impacted households and business. We need a sustainable revenue source to continue to fund the additional cost of delivering the services that Canberrans expect. What would not be responsible is to slash and burn services and massively increase revenue. We are doing neither in this budget, but that is always what is posited by the opposition.

### **Parking—car parking costs**

**MR COCKS:** My question is to the Minister for City and Government Services.

Minister, government is once again increasing the cost of parking fees. The cost of parking in the City Centre will rise by 4.57 per cent, and parking in Yarralumla by 5.88 per cent. Why, when the government has previously proposed general fee increases that were wage price indexed, plus a small amount, did parking increases far exceed this?

**MS CHEYNE:** I do not have that information in front of me, Mr Speaker, but again, I think I might be able to get it by the end of question time, so I am taking it on notice.

**MR COCKS:** Minister, how can the government claim to be addressing the cost of living for Canberrans whilst simultaneously increasing parking fees far beyond wage price index?

**MS CHEYNE:** Well, parking. Ultimately, Mr Speaker, the use of land has a cost and the government seeks to recover that cost and that is the frame through which decisions are made.

**MR CAIN:** Minister, is this excessive fee hike another way this government is trying to push Canberrans off the roads?

**MS CHEYNE:** No.

### **Bulk-billing—general practice clinics**

**MS VASSAROTTI:** My question is to the Minister for Health.

As we in the Greens have been pushing for the government to deliver more bulk-billed GP appointments, we are really pleased to see that three new bulk-billing GP clinics are set to open soon. We understand they will be funded for three years, in the hope that the triple bulk-billing incentive and the 12.5 per cent admin fee will enable them to be self-sustaining in a few years. However, the triple bulk-billing is less of an incentive in urban areas because rebates do not cover the cost of the medical bill. Given all that, what is the government's long-term plan for fiscal sustainability of the three new bulk-billing clinics after the three years of government funding runs out?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I thank Ms Vassarotti for the question. As she would be well aware, general practice and primary care is not the responsibility of the ACT government and the funding mechanism that she is talking about in relation to the three new bulk-billing clinics is a commonwealth funding program. Of course, we very much welcome that commonwealth funding towards their responsibility for primary care and general practice in the ACT, and we are pleased to see more bulk-billing GP clinics opening here.

The ACT government is backing this in with significant investment to support more bulk-billing in the ACT. That was delivered in the 2025-26 budget. That includes ensuring payroll tax changes for medical practices from 1 July 2025, exempted income received from bulk-billing GP services from the calculation of payroll tax and \$2.36 million over four years to grow the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce, and that does include supporting general practice to recruit and retain Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workers. But really importantly, \$7.3 million was committed over four years to support GPs through bulk-billing

incentives for children and young people—the second stage of that process is currently being assessed by officials—and to support the wellbeing and professional development of GPs. So all of that represents two Labor governments working together to further strengthen Medicare, a great Labor achievement.

**MS VASSAROTTI:** After these new bulk-billing clinics are delivered, what is the role of the ACT in terms of tracking the target of 160,000 new bulk-billed GP appointments a year?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** We do not gather that data, but we will continue to track that data in relation to bulk-billed GP appointments. We recognise that is part of our parliamentary agreement with the Greens, to aim for that. Part of our focus is supporting access to GPs for children. That is a one and a half million dollar initiative available to support general practice community health centres and Aboriginal Community Controlled health organisations that commit to bulk-billing children under 16 in the ACT. Applications, as I said, were open. They closed on 23 March for the first round. There were providers that were encouraged to engage in a more detailed process around that. We expect that innovative proposals will be supported through this to ensure as many children and young people in the ACT as possible can be bulk-billed because we know that supporting the health of children and young people, particularly in the early years and then as they go through adolescence, is something that sets them up well for a healthy life, and is very much in line with the prevention approach that the Greens keep going on about and saying that the ACT Labor government is not investing in. One of the areas of prevention that we are strongly investing in is the wellbeing of children and young people in our community, setting them up for a healthy future.

**MISS NUTTALL:** Minister, pre-existing GP clinics may well ask where their seed funding is, so where is the incentive for them to go fully bulk-billed?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I thank Miss Nuttall for the question. Ms Vassarotti in her first question actually talked about the triple bulk-billing incentive, which was expanded from being available for bulk-billed appointments for children and young people and older people to being applicable to all bulk-billed GP appointments and then the 12.5 per cent practice incentive for practices that choose to be fully bulk-billing. That has seen 11 practices—before we even get to the specific three new practices being established under the new program—the current program has seen 11 existing practices choose to become, or remain, fully bulk-billing in the ACT.

The majority of those practices are in Canberra's north, but of course we worked very closely with the commonwealth government to ensure that the Interchange down in Tuggeranong, I think it is called something like Tuggeranong family practice now, was going to remain a fully bulk-billing GP practice as well. I understand that another one of the practices to be established will also be in Tuggeranong. Of course, we are going to work closely with the Capital Health Network with the opening of our new South Tuggeranong Health Centre and ensure that we have really strong integration between bulk-billed general practice in the Tuggeranong region and our new South Tuggeranong Health Centre, as well as, of course, the existing community health centre and Walk-in Centre in Tuggeranong.

### **Sports grounds—facilities**

**MR MILLIGAN:** My question is for the Minister for Sport and Recreation—or Ms Cheyne in this instance.

I would like to thank the minister for attending our sportsground roundtable but, as she is not here today, you can pass that on for me, Ms Cheyne. A key message from sporting clubs on the night was that they pay their sportsground fees to help cover maintenance but are left playing on dangerous fields.

One individual followed up with my office after the meeting to say, "We are increasingly frustrated by the disparity between the fees charged for use of the facility, and the standard of infrastructure maintenance provided." Can Ms Cheyne please confirm that the ACT government is meeting all of its obligations under the sportsgrounds charter?

**MS CHEYNE:** A reasonable question. I do not know. I will certainly make sure that I pass on your lovely comments, Mr Milligan, but I do not know so I will take it on notice. I would reflect, I think, more broadly, that one of the challenges is that our sportsgrounds are being used in ways that are not for sport. And, when our sportsgrounds need constant remediation, then that is going to put pressure on the workforce and the funding that is available to us for the general maintenance of sportsgrounds. So, I suspect that this probably has something to do with it, but, to be sure, I will take it on notice.

**MR MILLIGAN:** Can the minister clarify with the sports minister: is the justification to increase sportsground fees during a cost-of-living crisis warranted, considering that the conditions of the ovals are not meeting the community's expectations?

**MS CHEYNE:** I will take that on notice.

**MR PARTON:** Will the government consider reviewing the sportsground fees charged to users of fields which have received little or no maintenance?

**MS CHEYNE:** I will take it on notice.

### **Infrastructure—government infrastructure projects**

**MR MILLIGAN:** My question is for the Chief Minister. In question time yesterday, you stated, in a response to my question about delays to local infrastructure in my electorate, that the ACT has reached peak capacity to build infrastructure. However, the CEO of the Master Builders Association said on radio earlier this week that the ACT construction sector is hungry to build. She also said there is capacity there to deliver significant public work.

Chief Minister, isn't the true reason that the infrastructure is being delayed due to your budget mismanagement and not the capacity of the construction sector?

**MR BARR:** No, and I would note those same organisations have been very clear, both locally and nationally, about the extreme workforce shortages that are being experienced across nearly every element of the Australian infrastructure market, from

the specific trades through to some of the project management and engineering, and other qualifications. The workforce shortage estimated across the Australian infrastructure industry is in the order of 300,000 people. Our construction sector locally is around 19,000 people. There are currently more than 400 job vacancies advertised in that sector, so they are having difficulty finding people to undertake the work.

When we go out to the market to seek tenders for particular projects, sometimes we will only get one or sometimes no compliant responses, because there is not the capacity in the sector to continue to do more. The scale of the infrastructure program is the largest in the history of the territory, and it has not been able to be delivered in the last few years, and so money has rolled over from one year to the next. So it is logical to conclude, given all of those factors, that there just simply is not the capacity to undertake more new projects.

Now, I would point out also that we are expecting a significant increase in the workforce shifting into the housing sector to meet the pipeline that has been funded in this budget. We are also very wary of the reality that Queensland, ahead of the Brisbane Olympics, will certainly be drawing a significant workforce, because there are certain projects that absolutely must be built ahead of the 2032 Brisbane Olympics, and there is no way that either the Australian or Queensland governments would allow Brisbane to be in the position to not host those Olympics and not have the stadiums, the transport and other infrastructure—that would be a national embarrassment for Queensland.

**MR MILLIGAN:** Chief Minister, when did you become aware of the ACT allegedly reaching the peak of our capacity to build infrastructure?

**MR BARR:** That has become apparent over the last two fiscal years as a result of the program increasing in the size of the rollover increasing; hence, we took the decisions that we did in this year's budget to stage and delay some projects, making sure we focused on the projects that are currently under construction. The works in progress component of the infrastructure program this year and next is very significant and they will be the two largest years of infrastructure spend in the territory's history.

**MR CAIN:** Chief Minister, is it convenient that the government discovered this peak capacity, as you have said, over the last two years after the 2024 election?

**MR BARR:** No, because I had been pointing to the fact that it was going to be a very big infrastructure program in the budget that was delivered in 2024.

### **Roads—Athllon Drive duplication**

**MR PARTON:** My question is to the Minister for City and Government Services. Minister, yesterday's budget was yet another kick in the teeth for the people of Tuggeranong.

The duplication of Athllon Drive between Drakeford Drive and Sulwood Drive—something that has been promised for longer than most of us have been in this place—has been delayed yet again. We now learn that the project, which the Treasurer's first budget promised would be completed by the end of 2028, has been delayed until the end of 2029. This project is slated to be delivered over eight years later than the

completion date promised when it first appeared in the budget papers back in 2021, and some 17 years after the duplication idea was first floated. Minister, why has this project consistently been delayed year after year, and when do you expect that this project will actually be delivered?

**MS CHEYNE:** In terms of actually being delivered, let me take that on notice. In terms of why it is being delayed, history will show that planning has been complicated. There have been some decisions that we have had to take in the past where other duplications or investments have had to be prioritised over others. It has depended on whether or not we have been able to get commonwealth funding to support us. As the Treasurer and the Chief Minister have explained at length, there are pressures on overall delivery that can be achieved in this city at the moment, and we need to be realistic about those timeframes.

**MR PARTON:** When it comes to the reasons for the delay, would we blame the lack of tradies more than the war in the Middle East?

**MS CHEYNE:** I think that is a hypothetical, Mr Speaker.

**Mr Parton:** It is not a hypothetical. It is not a hypothetical at all.

*Mr Cain interjecting—*

**MR SPEAKER:** Are you taking a point of order or are you just interjecting?

**Mr Parton:** I do not believe it is a hypothetical. The question is: when it comes to the delay, would we blame the lack of tradies more than we blame the war in the Middle East? That is not a hypothetical at all.

**MR SPEAKER:** On the point of order?

**MS CHEYNE:** Mr Parton said “would we”. He can ask himself.

**MR SPEAKER:** I think we will move on to a supplementary.

**MR COCKS:** Minister, can the duplication of Athllon Drive be put next to the undelivered ice sports facility on the shelf of broken and hollow promises for the forgotten people and communities south of the lake?

**MS CHEYNE:** I think the complications with the ice sports facility are well known in this place. Minister Berry has been steadfast in her commitment to delivering it, but when there are external factors, and in this case external parties involved, that does get a lot more complicated, unfortunately. I know that this has been a source of great frustration not only for her but also for the people of Tuggeranong and, indeed, the entire Canberra community. We do wish the Canberra Brave all the best.

In terms of whether Athllon Drive is a broken promise, we have been clear that we are committed to delivering these projects, but we also need to be realistic about the capacity of the sector, and with prices having gone up, for all sorts of reasons.

*Opposition members interjecting—*

### **Housing affordability—first home buyers**

**MR WERNER-GIBBINGS:** My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, can you please outline to the Assembly how the 2026-27 ACT budget supports more Canberrans to get their first home?

**MR STEEL:** I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings. This is a big budget for housing. Through the budget, the government is abolishing stamp duty for all first home buyers in the ACT if they want to buy a home to live in. It makes us the first jurisdiction in Australia to do so. From 1 July, no first home buyer in the ACT will have to pay stamp duty. Our \$770 million investment in housing is not just about enabling more housing; it is also about more Canberrans being able to call these houses their homes. We are doing this by removing one of the biggest up-front costs and barriers to home ownership, opening the door for more Canberrans to have their own home sooner. It complements the tax reforms that were undertaken by the commonwealth government in their budget in May which level the playing field and support first home buyers in the market. ACT Labor took our commitment to the last election and, through this budget, we are delivering on that commitment in full.

**MR WERNER-GIBBINGS:** Treasurer, what does this budget do to support the government's missing middle housing reforms?

**MR STEEL:** I thank the member for his supplementary. Not only does this budget support more Canberrans to have their own home; it also provides Canberrans with more housing choice, through a package of tax cuts to support our missing middle housing reforms. As part of that, we are developing a Canberra House Pattern Book, to provide a collection of pre-approved, architect-designed plans for missing middle homes, providing more certainty and efficiency through the approvals pathway for these homes. I anticipate that regulatory change will be required to support that, and I look forward to briefing members of the Assembly on that as we progress that work, as well as the competition that we will run to come up with well-designed homes that fit in well with Canberra streets and climate.

We will provide a time limited 50 per cent reduction in the codified lease variation charge for eligible missing middle housing developments in RZ1 and RZ2 areas, which will lower overall development costs for these homes and incentivise their development, aligned with our target of enabling 30,000 homes by 2030. And we will abolish stamp duty for owner-occupiers of newly titled missing middle homes, removing one of the biggest up-front costs for Canberrans wanting to live in these homes. Through the budget, we are investing in housing supply, we are investing in housing choice and we are investing in housing success.

**MS TOUGH:** Treasurer, how do the changes that we make in this budget complement the Australian government's reforms to support more first home buyers?

**MR STEEL:** I thank Ms Tough for her question. Housing is a national issue, and it is great to see the investment in housing supply and housing ownership by the federal Labor government. New national partnership payments are provided by the

commonwealth to the states and territories through Federation Funding Agreements, including \$50 million under the 10,000 homes for first home buyers initiative to support the delivery of up to 100,000 new homes reserved for sale to first home buyers across the country, and \$50 million from the Housing Support Program's Local Infrastructure Fund for the ACT to build the enabling infrastructure, including utilities and other infrastructure needed to unlock new housing developments. The ACT government's Help to Buy intergovernmental agreement, which commenced in December last year, will provide shared equity opportunities for low- and middle-income households to purchase or build a home. Also, the ACT is one of only three jurisdictions invited to participate in the New Homes Bonus, which is a payment for us being on track to meet our share of the national housing target.

We are seeing a very significant level of investment to help Australians and Canberrans have a home to call their own, and that is because we have two levels of government—a federal Labor government and an ACT Labor government—who believe it is a cause worth investing in.

### **Light rail—stage 2B**

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

Minister, I note the budget initiative titled Delivering Light Rail to Woden. This initiative shows capital provisions between 2027-28 and 2029-30 offset by equivalent capital reductions in the preceding years. Minister, does this represent a now-official delay to light rail stage 2B of one additional year?

**MR STEEL:** No. I will continue to update the Assembly on the timeline for stage 2B. That initiative goes to the delivery of light rail stage 2A, which is of course under construction—and it did cause a little bit of disruption on our road network today, I admit, Mr Speaker—which is actually ahead of schedule in terms of the construction work underway. That initiative also takes into account the ongoing planning work that is underway on stage 2B of light rail and I will continue to provide updates to the timeline for that project. But we have said all along that, of course, it is subject to third-party decisions by the federal government through the NCA, through the federal parliament in relation to the project. But we are going to progress through each milestone. We are going to do that in a systematic way to make sure we can progress the project. And we continue to fund it in the budget, together with the commonwealth, who also made a contribution of 50 per cent for the planning and design of that project.

So no, there is not a new timeline that has been announced in the budget. But as we progress through the next stage, which is trying to get approval for the EIS and through the Environment Biodiversity Conservation Act process, then I will continue to provide updates to the Assembly through that and as we move into the next stage.

**MR BRADDOCK:** Minister, can you promise—and cross your heart—that the light rail stage 2B will actually be built, and that people will be able to ride on it to the Woden Valley in time for the 2032 election?

**MR STEEL:** Well, just to reiterate the process that we are in, we have got to go through the planning and design process. We have gone through a significant milestone now of finalising an EIS and submitting it to the commonwealth—a substantial milestone. So

we are showing progress on the project. We are going to continue to work through each of those stages to make sure that we can deliver light rail to Woden. and then we will develop the business case. Government will have an opportunity to consider that, make an investment decision. We have to go through the procurement process as well.

So we are working through, and that is what you do with infrastructure projects, including the most complex and large infrastructure projects that the territory has ever had to deliver. You work through each stage systemically. Part of that process will also be engaging with the commonwealth not just on the planning approvals, but with Infrastructure Australia through their processes and with the federal minister for infrastructure and transport to secure funding for the project because the project cannot be delivered without a federal contribution of 50 per cent, and so that will be a critical decision-making point in the process and it is contingent on that funding being provided to be able to get a project of that size underway in the ACT.

We will also be looking at the financing options. There are decisions that are yet to be made about that. Obviously we have used a PPP process for stage 1 of light rail and the augmentation of stage 2A, and what that has meant is that it has spread the cost out over a longer period of time so that the cash impact on the budget is not as significant as it would otherwise be if it was paid upfront. So we have to work through all of those decisions but we are continuing to progress it through the 26-27 budget.

**MS VASSAROTTI:** Minister, I think you might have partly answered this question in your first answer. But in that same initiative, does the additional capital expenditure for 26-27 and 27-28 represent the full extent of all remaining costs for light rail stage 2A?

**MR STEEL:** Well, the project has not finished yet, so we will see what costs come out in the end. But it is on track; that is good news. And I will update the Assembly on that through the budget process and decisions that are made in relation to the project as it is completed. But yes, it is fully funded through the budget. I will take on notice any further information that I can provide to the Assembly.

**Mr Barr:** With that, we're on track to finish at 3.01. I ask that all further questions be placed on the notice paper.

### **Supplementary answers to questions without notice**

#### **Thriving Kids—federal government funding**

**MS ORR:** I can confirm that the page of *Budget outlook* that Miss Nuttall was seeking a reference for is page 119. Also, I am advised that the commonwealth is passing on 60 per cent of its half of the funding committed to states and territories and is retaining 40 per cent for nationally consistent services.

#### **Woods Reserve campgrounds—pets exclusion**

**MS CHEYNE:** As promised, I am reporting back to Ms Castley's question about Woods Reserve. The decision about whether dogs are allowed there has not yet been made. The government is reviewing the rules and regulations for the site to help protect important conservation values while supporting visitor experience and safety. That includes measures to reduce impacts on native vegetation, wildlife and waterways, as

well as managing how visitors move through and use the area. Final arrangements will be confirmed and communicated to the public in coming months.

I would note that dogs are currently permitted at Pierces Creek, Blue Range, Uriarra Reserve and Kowen Forest, but I believe Blue Range is the only campground there. At the moment, assessments of ecological values are being undertaken at Woods Reserve. If ecological values are found at that site, decisions may flow through from that about how the site is used, including whether dogs are allowed. That work is currently underway.

### **Roads—Athllon Drive duplication**

**MS CHEYNE:** On Athllon Drive, my staff have informed me that I could be more helpful. The timeline for the duplication of the southern section of Athllon Drive has been delayed due to additional design and utility relocation requirements identified through design development in 2025, as well as protracted planning approvals. iCBR is preparing for release of the construction tender in June 2026 and, once a contractor is appointed, construction is anticipated to commence later this year. It is expected to take three years to complete. So, by my maths, that still takes us to the end of 2029.

### **Parking—parking fees**

**MS CHEYNE:** On parking fees, regrettably I cannot give that answer in the chamber today, so it remains on notice and I will respond in that way.

## **Standing Committees Membership**

**MR SPEAKER:** Members, in accordance with standing order 222, I have been notified in writing of the nomination of Mr Cain as a member of the Standing Committee on Transport and City Services.

Motion (by **Ms Cheyne**) agreed to:

That the Member so nominated be appointed as a member of the Standing Committee on Transport and City Services.

### **Leave of absence**

Motion (by **Ms Cheyne**) agreed to:

That leave of absence be granted to Ms Berry (Deputy Chief Minister) for this sitting due to caregiving reasons.

## **Road Transport (Alcohol and Drugs) Amendment Bill 2026**

**Mr Braddock**, pursuant to notice, presented the bill and its explanatory statement.

Title read by Clerk.

**MR BRADDOCK** (Yerrabi) (3.06): I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

Today I am pleased to introduce the Road Transport (Alcohol and Drugs) Amendment Bill 2026. The purpose of this bill is not to create an exemption for medicinal cannabis users; it is to remove the discriminatory treatment they currently face. There is a double standard at work here. If you have a patient taking a prescribed opioid, you need to show actual impairment while driving in order to be charged with an offence. There is no automatic offence simply for the presence of an opioid in your system, nor does this go onto your record in any way. It is legal for you to drive if you are taking prescribed opioids under your doctor's direction. By contrast, if you are a patient taking medicinal cannabis prescribed by a qualified and accredited doctor, the simple presence of THC in your system constitutes an offence, and such a presence can last for days after use without impairment to driving. You will automatically gain a criminal record, a fine and licence disqualification on detection.

Meanwhile, studies have shown that opioids account for twice as many road crash casualties as cannabis. In fact, there is no finding in Australia that attributes a fatality to prescribed medicinal cannabis in a driver's system. This proposed amendment removes that double standard. It is a timely proposal. Last week, the New South Wales Minns Labor government announced they would introduce similar legislation. Let's park that word "similar" for the moment. I will return to it.

I want to outline the three pillars supporting the case for change. Firstly, I go to the scientific pillar. Four peer-reviewed Australian studies from two independent universities demonstrated medicinal cannabis patients using their prescribed medicine at therapeutic doses show negligible impairment on objective driving and cognitive measures. The roadside drug test does not measure impairment; it measures presence. These are not the same thing.

There is the legal and ethical pillar. Every other prescribed psychoactive drug in Australia—whether it be opioids, benzos or antipsychotics—are governed by an impairment standard. Medicinal cannabis patients are denied this same framework. The distinction is not evidence based; it derives from the historical status of cannabis as a prohibited drug, not from road safety science.

And, finally, there is the policy pillar. Tasmania has operated a statutory defence for lawfully-prescribed patients for years without road safety deterioration. Victoria has partially reformed. The New South Wales Minns government announced on 4 June 2026 that it will introduce legislation to parliament. The United Kingdom has operated with a statutory medical defence since 2015. The question for this Assembly is whether the ACT leads on the evidence or waits to be the last jurisdiction to act.

It is estimated that, as at 2024, over 900,000 prescribing approvals for medicinal cannabis had been granted by the Therapeutic Goods Administration. There might be veterans with PTSD, those living with endometriosis, cancer patients, people dealing with Parkinson's, multiple sclerosis or ALS, or older people trying to maintain their quality of life in the face of arthritis and other forms of chronic pain. At this point, I would like to thank Josh Hynes, who joins us in the gallery today, for his excellent work

in developing this bill and also pulling together this case for consideration by the Assembly. Under current ACT legislation, every one of those people would be breaking the law if THC was found to be present in their body during a routine roadside alcohol and drug test, regardless of whether the THC was actually impairing their driving ability.

Former New South Wales Magistrate David Heilpern has described this as “probably the greatest criminalisation of our population in Australian legal history”. There have been many rigorous studies conducted around this issue. Real-world data from Tasmania and the United Kingdom has shown zero evidence of compromised road safety during more than a decade of statutory medical defence. As former Magistrate Heilpern noted, there have been large reductions in the road toll following previous significant reforms, such as the introduction of airbags and the prohibition of drink driving. The introduction of driver drug testing has not shown such a drop. The key here is that presence does not equal impairment. THC does not metabolise in the human body in the same way that alcohol does. Due to its rapid metabolism, there is a strong correlation between blood alcohol level and impairment. In contrast, THC is fat-soluble and metabolises much more slowly. THC can remain detectable for many hours or days beyond the time window in which it creates any possible level of impairment.

Importantly, this proposed amendment does not affect the existing legislation regarding impairment. That is a separate part of the act: section 24; driving under the influence. This section requires actual impairment—in other words, that the driver was incapable of having proper control of the vehicle—and it applies to all drivers, including opioid and benzo patients. As I have said, presence does not equal impairment, and even presence is difficult to establish. Mobile drug testing devices have a significantly higher rate of returning false positives and false negatives than alcohol breath-testing devices. One study reported five per cent false positives and 16 per cent false negatives, while another reported 10 per cent false positives and nine per cent false negatives.

Let’s take a closer look at the evidence around cannabis use and increased driving risk. Three studies from overseas concluded that recent recreational cannabis use creates an increased risk no greater than 50 per cent above the baseline. Does that sound like a lot? It might, but let’s put that into perspective. That is half the increased risk of driving at the legal alcohol limit of 0.05, and that research is based on doses far higher than used for medicinal cannabis purposes, meaning medicinal cannabis users are in an even lower risk band. The four Australian studies on prescribed patients found basically zero measurable driving impairment at normal medicinal doses.

Australian epidemiological research shows that benzos and opioids each account for more than twice as many road crash casualties as recreational cannabis. Dr Michael White, a former government road safety official in South Australia and Adjunct Senior Fellow at the School of Psychology at Adelaide University, has a theory about why we are likely to come down harder on THC in a driver’s system than other prescription drugs. He said:

The exceptional treatment of medicinal cannabis can largely be attributed to the fact that cannabis found itself on the wrong side of the fence in America’s punitive and counterproductive war on drugs. We should no longer be blinded by this accident of history. All drugs with both medicinal and recreational uses should be treated similarly.

That is exactly what this amendment sets out to do.

Let's talk about how it would do it. I mentioned earlier that New South Wales has just announced similar legislation. I applaud the fact that they are moving in the right and prevailing direction. The model I propose today is better because it seeks full harmonisation between the way prescribed medicinal cannabis is treated and the way other prescription medications are treated.

New South Wales still puts medicinal cannabis users into a separate basket. They must register with Transport for NSW, showing proof of a valid prescription and completion of an online education program to be eligible. They must be unrestricted licence holders. Commercial drivers, L-platers and P-platers suffering chronic pain or similar need not apply. There is a three-strike system. If someone is on their third warning in two years, there is a \$704 fine and a three-month minimum licence suspension. The proposed New South Wales system would be reviewed after 12 months, and I hope we might see a better effort at harmonisation at that point.

I recognise that the ACT is an island surrounded by New South Wales, so it becomes a topical question, but I also believe it would be challenging to adopt the proposed New South Wales law into the ACT for a number of reasons. Firstly, there is the additional impost on police and our court system. Secondly, I struggle to see how it could be found to be compatible with our Human Rights Act. For these reasons, I endorse the model in the bill I present today as being in the territory's best interests, as well as the best interests of medicinal cannabis users here in the ACT.

Victoria's reform, in force since March last year, also moves in the right direction but fails to achieve harmonisation. Victorian magistrates now have the discretion not to cancel a driver's licence due to the mere presence of prescribed THC, but the driver is still left with a criminal charge, a criminal record and a fine. Here in the ACT, we have the opportunity to act in a way that is evidence led, logical, rational, practical and, importantly, simple.

Our existing legislation under the Road Transport (Alcohol and Drugs) Act 1977 already criminalises actual impairment and will continue to do so for medicinal cannabis users. The proposed amendment to section 20 of the act is both narrow and precise. As the explanatory statement sets out, the defence provides that, "where THC was the only prescribed drug detected and was lawfully used" the defendant has a defence to a presence based charge. Impaired driving remains an offence under section 24, regardless of any prescription. This is exactly what would happen to a driver showing the presence of prescribed opioids or benzos.

Finally, it is worth underlining what the amendment does not do. It does not decriminalise drug-impaired driving. It does not remove the driving under the influence offence. It does not remove any police power to address impaired driving. It simply helps thousands of Canberrans to appropriately, safely and responsibly manage their physical or mental health conditions in consultation with their doctors without fearing that they will face criminal charges as a result.

I commend this amendment bill to the Assembly.

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

**MR BRADDOCK** (Yerrabi) (3.18), by leave: I move:

That, notwithstanding standing order 174(d), should a committee choose to inquire into the Road Transport (Alcohol and Drugs) Amendment Bill 2026, that committee shall present its report by 16 October 2026.

This is a simple procedural item in order to give the committee sufficient time in order to undertake its inquiry, given the length of time we have between now and the next sitting week.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **Crime—youth crime**

**MR PARTON** (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (3.19): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) retail workers and managers in Tuggeranong have raised serious concerns about crime, retail theft, abuse, intimidation and antisocial behaviour;
- (b) the primary concern raised by local retailers at a local crime forum was the safety and wellbeing of staff, and not merely the financial cost of theft;
- (c) workers reported incidents including verbal abuse, threats, physical intimidation, property damage, theft and harassment;
- (d) retailers advised that much of this behaviour involves repeat offenders and has become more brazen in recent years;
- (e) retail workers should not be expected to tolerate abuse, threats or intimidation as part of their job;
- (f) police resources are finite and police cannot attend every incident of retail theft or antisocial behaviour; and
- (g) an effective response must protect workers and the community while intervening early in the lives of offenders;

(2) further notes that:

- (a) crime in retail precincts is not only a policing issue;
- (b) repeat offending can involve complex factors including disengagement from school, poor supervision, substance use, mental health issues, family breakdown, peer influence and lack of meaningful structure;
- (c) a purely reactive approach leaves workers exposed, retailers frustrated, police repeatedly called to the same locations and offenders drifting further into the justice system; and
- (d) the goal should not be to put more young offenders in handcuffs, but to stop harmful behaviour early, protect victims and ensure young people are actively case-managed; and

- (3) calls on the Government to:
- (a) develop and table, by the second sitting week of September 2026, a youth offending pathways and intervention strategy informed by:
    - (i) consulting with retail workers, retailers, shopping centre management, ACT Policing, Canberra PCYC, youth justice, schools, child and family services, health services and relevant community organisations;
    - (ii) identifying practical points of early intervention, including schools, police contact, retail precincts, youth services, family services and community organisations; and
    - (iii) ensuring repeat young offenders are subject to timely multi-agency case conferencing, involving police, youth justice, education, child and family services, health services, parents or carers and youth outreach providers where appropriate; and
  - (b) report back to the Assembly on implementation, referral pathways, program uptake and early outcomes by the first sitting week of 2027.

I rise today to speak to this motion on retail worker safety, but, as importantly, the need for earlier, better intervention in the lives of young people at risk of offending. At the outset, I thank the government and the crossbench for their engagement on this motion. This is an area where I hope the Assembly can come together.

Across Canberra, businesses, workers, families and homeowners are telling us they are increasingly worried about crime, antisocial behaviour and repeat offending. That concern is being felt right across our city, and, in my electorate of Tuggeranong, it is being felt as hard as anywhere else. Recently, local retail workers, managers, police, and community organisations, came together at a forum in Tuggeranong to talk about youth crime and worker safety. The forum was put on by the Shoppies union. They did an exceptional job in getting everyone in a room. Some of what we heard was surprising and some of it was not. It was all deeply concerning. We certainly heard a lot of anecdotes—bad anecdotes—about the reality of retail life day to day. Retailers spoke about theft, abuse, threats, intimidation and property damage. But the bottom line was that the first concern was the safety and wellbeing of staff, not merely the cost of stolen goods.

Individuals who oversee staff spoke and were dismayed at the fact that, from their perspective, they were not able to properly protect their staff, and they were tearing their hair out over it. Retail workers should not have to go to work wondering whether they will be abused, threatened or intimidated during their shift. They should not have to accept threats as part of the job. They should not have to feel unsafe because a small number of repeat offenders are able to continue causing harm without effective intervention.

At the forum, the regional manager of a chain store, which I will not name, made a particular sobering observation. Their staff turnover in the ACT is three times the national average. I want you to get your head around that: the staff turnover at this national chain outlet in the ACT is three times the national average. They are often young workers; they are students, casual workers, parents, people trying to earn a living. If the workplace becomes unsafe and stressful, people leave, and that is what they are

doing, and it is not fair. It is bad for workers, it is bad for business, and it is bad for the community.

This motion, as much as anything else, is about trying to keep people safe and sane. That is what we are trying to do here. This motion is not about pretending that the answer is to simply put more young people in handcuffs. Police have an important role. There must be consequences for serious violent and repeat offending. Victims and workers must be protected.

For many young people, the pathway to offending begins much earlier. It involves disengagement from school, family breakdown and violence at home, poor supervision, substance use, or simply lack of structure and direction. If we wait until police are repeatedly called to the same shops, the same families and the same young people, we have already waited too long. That is why the motion calls for a proper strategy for early intervention. It asks for clear referral pathways and practical pathways back into school, sport, mentoring, employment and community life.

This is a balanced motion. It recognises the real harm being done to retail workers and businesses. It recognises the fear felt by homeowners and families across Canberra. It recognises that, if we want safer communities, we need to intervene before young people become entrenched in criminal behaviour. This is about prevention, it is about protecting workers, it is about supporting local businesses, and it is about giving young people a pathway away from crime before it is too late.

I note the positive engagement with the minister responsible, Mr Pettersson. I know that he is going to bring an amendment forward, which we are supportive of. I also note that, just prior to commencing this debate, we received another series of amendments that are being circulated by Ms Vassarotti. I will wait to hear Ms Vassarotti speak to these, but my first instinct is to oppose those amendments. I will wait to hear what Ms Vassarotti has to say. We have had all week to discuss these potential amendments, and this is not a Greens motion spot. It is a Liberal motion spot, and we are quite happy with the motion as it was originally put together. We would have been more than happy to engage with Ms Vassarotti at some stage during the week, but I am not really sure that we want to change the direction of the motion in such a way at the last possible moment. I will wait until I have heard what Ms Vassarotti has to say.

I commend the motion to the Assembly.

**MR PETTERSSON** (Yerrabi—Minister for Business, Arts and Creative Industries, Minister for Children, Youth and Families, Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Minister for Skills, Training and Industrial Relations) (3.25): I would like to thank Mr Parton for bringing this motion here today. I have a small amendment which I will now move, Mr Deputy Speaker.

The government is largely very happy working with Mr Parton in advancing his motion today. As Minister for Children, Youth and Families, I see every day the incredible contribution young people make to Canberra. For those who need additional support, this motion provides an opportunity to highlight the importance of diversion and appropriate intervention for young people at risk.

As we mark the one-year anniversary of raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility, I want to be very clear about what these reforms mean in practice—and what they do not mean. We are not removing a response to harm. And we are not doing “nothing” when young people cause harm in our community. We are responding, and we are doing more.

For members of the community, their response remains exactly the same: if you see unlawful, dangerous or harmful behaviour, call the police. Regardless of the apparent age of those involved, call the police. Police remain the important first responders they have always been. What changes is what happens next.

When young people cause harm to themselves or others, our MACR reforms replace a criminal justice response with the response children actually need: coordinated services, therapeutic support and interventions or orders that improve outcomes for both young people and the broader community. Crime, retail theft and antisocial behaviour are real. They affect workers, businesses and the broader community, and addressing them remains a key priority for this government.

As minister responsible for youth justice, I know that responding effectively to harmful behaviour by vulnerable young people requires a coordinated whole-of-system response; one that improves community safety while addressing the factors that drive offending. We pursue this approach because we want better outcomes for young people, but also because we know it is the most effective way to reduce harm, prevent escalation and divert vulnerable young people away from a pathway that, too often, leads to serious and repeat offending.

This government’s approach is grounded in prevention, early intervention, restorative practice and community safety. As I outlined on Wednesday when marking the one-year anniversary of MACR, significant reforms are already strengthening pathways to divert young people from offending and connect them with the services they need. We know that punitive, criminogenic responses increase the likelihood of reoffending.

That is why these reforms prioritise early, trauma-informed support through the Therapeutic Support Panel and Safer Youth Response Service. One provides immediate, 24-hour crisis intervention and support; the other delivers coordinated long-term therapeutic responses tailored to each young person's needs.

This sits alongside broader service system reform already underway. The Youth Justice Case Management team provides supervision and case management for young people on custodial and community-based orders, coordinating rehabilitation and therapeutic supports both in Bimberi and during their transition back into the community. The focus is clear: addressing the drivers of offending and reducing reoffending.

Coordinated responses are already in place for young people with complex needs and repeat justice system contact. This includes care team meetings and the recidivist offender multi-agency round table, otherwise known as ROMART. ROMART is directly delivering much of what Mr Parton seeks through this motion today. Led by ACT Policing, it brings together youth justice, child and youth services, education and therapeutic services to identify intervention opportunities and coordinate responses for young people who are causing significant harm in the community.

We also have programs, such as the REAL program, which supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in detention to reconnect with education, employment, community and culture—key protective factors which reduce reoffending.

However, our work is not done. There is more work to do, and I am committed, as minister, to doing more. That is why the ACT government committed last year to developing a youth justice strategic plan. The strategic plan will guide reform over the next five years, bringing together prevention, diversion, rehabilitation and throughcare into a clear roadmap for improving outcomes and maintaining community safety. It recognises that offending is often driven by complex factors—trauma, disengagement from education, family circumstances, mental health challenges and substance use—and that effective responses must address those drivers while maintaining community safety.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I am pleased to inform the Assembly that the strategic plan has already been drafted and will be released for formal consultation within the next month. I want to thank the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body, which reviewed the draft strategic plan last month and provided valuable feedback on how the plan can contribute to Closing the Gap, as well as reducing the over representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in detention.

Further consultation will have a mix of targeted and public stakeholder opportunities. Consultation will include young people with lived experience, Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, ACT Policing, youth workers, oversight bodies and the broader community. The public consultation will also provide an opportunity for workers, businesses and all Canberrans to help shape future reforms.

We are also progressing a therapeutic model of care for Bimberi, and I am looking forward to attending a workshop later this month alongside the ACT National Preventive Mechanism, to help shape it. We have invested an additional \$1.6 million to strengthen operations, including a pilot throughcare model for Bimberi that improves support before, during and after detention.

The challenge before us is not whether we respond when young people cause harm in our community. The challenge is how we respond. We can choose responses that make us feel tough in the moment, but leave us with more victims, more offending and more young people trapped in the justice system in the years ahead. Or we can choose responses that are evidence-based, that address the causes of offending, that support victims and communities, and that reduce the likelihood of harm occurring again.

This government has made its choice. We will continue investing in prevention, early intervention and rehabilitation. We will continue supporting ACT Policing and the workers, families and businesses affected by crime and antisocial behaviour. And we will continue holding community safety and better outcomes for young people as complementary goals, not competing ones.

For every young person we divert from a lifetime of offending, there is a safer outcome for our community. For every young person we reconnect to education, employment,

culture, family and support, there is a safer outcome for our community. Every intervention that prevents future victims is a safer outcome for our community. That is the work we are undertaking. It is challenging work; it is long-term work; but it is the right work.

I move:

Omit all text in paragraph (3)(a), substitute:

- “(a) develop and table, by the second sitting week of October 2026, a Youth Justice Strategic Plan informed by:
- (i) consulting with retail workers, retailers, shopping centre management, ACT Policing, Canberra PCYC, youth justice, schools, child and family services, health services and relevant community organisations;
  - (ii) identifying practical points of early intervention, including schools, police contact, retail precincts, youth services, family services and community organisations; and
  - (iii) ensuring repeat young offenders are subject to timely multi-agency case conferencing, involving police, youth justice, education, child and family services, health services, parents or carers and youth outreach providers where appropriate; and”

**MS VASSAROTTI** (Kurrajong) (3.33): I move the following amendment to Mr Pettersson’s amendment, which just adds a couple of organisations to paragraph 3:

Omit paragraph (3)(a)(i), substitute:

- “(i) consulting with young people, retail workers, retailers, shopping centre management, ACT Policing, Canberra PCYC, youth justice, schools, child and family services, health services and relevant community organisations including Aboriginal community-controlled organisations.”

I have some additional amendments that I will move later in the debate but I will take the chance to speak now, in terms of the motion more broadly. As I have discussed with Mr Parton already, I just wanted to assure him that there have been discussions with Canberra Liberals around the amendments, and we have obviously run into some administrative issues that we can continue to talk about.

I would like to start by thanking Mr Parton for bringing this motion to the Assembly. It is—as I think you mentioned, Mr Parton—refreshing to see bipartisan agreement in this chamber regarding the vital need for restorative justice services, particularly for young people.

When times are tough for young people who might otherwise engage with the criminal justice system, our role as parliamentarians should be to support them; to guide them towards constructive pathways so they can create a better life that they want to live.

And it was a bit surprising to see the motion on the notice paper today, particularly given some of the discussions that we had in this chamber earlier in the week—particularly when we were hearing about the failures of reforms around raising the age

of criminal responsibility. So, it seems that we have finally come to a destination that many in the chamber had already reached, many years ago. And, while we welcome them to the table, the reality is that, while the government has been playing catch-up, the rest of us have been doing the heavy lifting on compassionate, evidence-based responses to crime in the city.

I would also like to recognise that we are having this debate at a particular point in time. Right now, we know that inflation and the rising cost of living are testing our community's moral fabric and our ideas of justice. We have seen throughout history that in times of financial and social hardship, crime and antisocial behaviour rise. After all, the idea that some people do things simply because they are, at their core, bad people is far too simplistic. Human beings are capable of immense good, just as we are capable of harm. I believe in the real complexity of life, and the real work of justice exists in the grey areas between the two.

In 2024, the Victorian government's Crime Statistics Agency found that increases in theft across states had been directly attributable to the rising cost of living. In fact, the report I am referencing found that 50 per cent of offenders were first-time offenders. That really showed how emergent and more complex this issue is than simple ideas of good and bad. Often in this place, we talk about crime as if it is entirely removed from our policy decisions; as if the only controls that we have are enforcement or individualistic moralising. But this data is irrefutable proof that when we, as politicians, fail to address the cost of healthcare, the cost of housing or stagnant wages, our community suffers. And the fallout is not just financial; it reflects directly in our crime rates.

It is also important to emphasise that this is not a phenomenon unique to young people. Young people are not a monolith. I was initially a bit hesitant around some of the wording of this motion, as it seemed to link crime to young people as if they were the primary drivers—although, through discussions, I am confident that this was not the intent. It actually reminded me of a wonderful, little-known story that hit the *Canberra Times* back in 1990, warning us about “juvenile satanic heavy metal cults from Tuggeranong” that were supposedly responsible 50 per cent of local crime. This was a serious headline reported not just in print but leading the five o'clock news. So, it certainly illustrates that this is not a new debate.

Most of all, I raise it because it is a fantastic example of how a debate can drift away from a compassionate, logical and evidence-based debate. Now, more than ever, I hope that the debate on this motion marks a beginning, that all members of this place are rising above those generalisations. Now, more than ever, we need to ensure that we are supporting young people in our community, not demonising them. My experience in a party that deeply values the engagement of young people has shown me that they are often the most caring, considerate and open-minded members of our community.

Mr Deputy Speaker, as noted, I will be moving some small amendments, which I believe complement the work that Mr Parton has done in drafting the original motion. Apart from a few technical adjustments, we wanted to highlight that young people are frequently, in fact, the frontline workers impacted by retail crime, especially as they make up roughly 40 per cent of the retail workforce. Furthermore, we wanted to recognise that family and domestic violence is a massive contributing factor to

perceived antisocial behaviour. It often forces young people to fend for themselves, couch surfing, navigating school without an income, and wondering where their next meal will come from.

Our response to these complex issues in a young person's life can shape a person's future. The fact is that people do not just stumble into crime; they are compounded into it by pre-existing inequalities. That is why I will be pleased to move the amendments. Most of all, we want to ensure that we recognise and respond to the intersecting factors that dictate the quality of our justice response.

Finally, I want to recognise and thank the government on its work on the youth justice strategic plan. Their amendments reflect the important work that is already underway in the initiative, and I was looking forward to constructively engaging with Mr Pettersson's office along with my colleague and Greens spokesperson for young people, Miss Nuttall to ensure that we build a lasting consensus on the issue in this place; one that truly delivers for young Canberrans of today and generations of tomorrow. Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, and thank you to Mr Parton for bringing this forward.

**MR EMERSON** (Kurrajong) (3.42): I would like to speak to the motion itself and to the multiple different amendments before us. First, I would like to thank the Leader of the Opposition for bringing this motion to the Assembly today. I appreciate and acknowledge members of our community have rightly raised concerns—particularly retail workers and the owners of the business that they work within—about crime, antisocial behaviour and safety issues involving young people.

Of course, this is not an issue that is unique to Tuggeranong, and I empathise, as many people have raised similar concerns in my electorate as well. People have a right to feel safe and to be able to work and conduct their business without the threat of crime or antisocial behaviour. If we do not support this, we put Canberra's reputation as a safe place, and a good place to open and conduct business, at risk. Businesses should not be at risk of unviability or suffer financially as a result of theft of stock or certain behaviours making those businesses undesirable places to visit. And staff should not have to deal with this either. The cost-of-living crisis means that doing business in Canberra is already hard enough, without additional challenges like these.

Of course, it is a nuanced issue, as multiple members have reflected, and as Mr Parton's motion rightly points out, this cannot be resolved through a police response alone. Like multiple members, I have spoken of these matters several times in this place already, and I am sure we will continue to do so.

There are so many complex factors that cause people to engage in criminal or antisocial behaviours, and usually those factors involve heartbreaking experiences of disadvantage, of neglect, of poverty and of being repeatedly failed by systems that are intended to support people having those experiences. It is particularly telling and concerning when incidents like these occur involving children and young people, but this is also a huge opportunity for intervention and proactive supports to correct the paths those young people have found themselves on.

I agree with Mr Parton that the goal should never be to put more young people in

handcuffs and that, instead, we should aim to stop that harmful behaviour early to protect victims and to ensure there is appropriate and proactive case-management for young people when we do see these behaviours. This is why it is incredibly important to invest sufficiently, and that must include sustainable, long-term investment in early intervention and prevention programs and supports, including culturally appropriate programs for children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds.

I appreciate Mr Parton's calls for a multidisciplinary approach to this matter, shaped by consultation with a range of community groups who are impacted by or have experience working to reduce youth crime, and I also applaud Mr Parton's calls for intensive and collaborative case management for children who desperately need support. My read of the motion and the amendments is that there is some disagreement about terminology, but I actually do think that everyone is fundamentally aiming at the same things, and as Ms Vassarotti pointed out in her remarks, I think that is a really good thing for the Assembly to be doing today.

Ms Vassarotti also rightly pointed out that two key stakeholders are missing from the multidisciplinary collaboration proposed by Mr Parton, notably young people themselves and Aboriginal community-controlled organisations, and I appreciate her emphasis on the need for restorative justice services as well. So as such, I am very supportive of her amendments.

I also want to acknowledge Minister Pettersson's office, who recently facilitated a briefing for me and my office on the forthcoming youth justice strategic plan. I am looking forward to seeing this finalised and published. It is something I have been following closely, and I am pleased to see that the minister has referred to it in his amendments to this motion.

While the delivery of this plan is long overdue and desperately needed, I understand it is on track to be finalised soon, based on that briefing, and I appreciate the minister's engagement on this matter. I also consider the request for an extra month to table this plan reasonable, and as such, I am supportive of the minister's amendments. With all of that said, I thank all parties for their collaboration on this motion and again thank the Leader of the Opposition for bringing it to the Assembly today.

**DR PATERSON** (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services, Minister for Women, Minister for the Prevention of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence, Minister for Corrections and Minister for Gaming Reform) (3.46): Whenever Canberra Liberals come forward with youth-crime-type motions or questions or comments, I tend to feel a level of escalation happening in myself, but I really commend Mr Parton on the tone of this discussion today and the framing of the debate. I really welcome it. I was also at the forum that Mr Parton talked about and recognise the struggles that retail workers and hospitality workers have been facing—there has been an increase in shoplifting, and I also recognise the challenges that they face in addressing the level of antisocial behaviour that they are experiencing.

One of the things that really stood out at the forum that Mr Parton did not mention was around workplace protection orders and just how incredibly important and helpful those orders have been for workplaces within, particularly, large retail centres. We heard from

one of the Coles directors who spoke about how Coles had been using those orders, and they had been incredibly effective, and all the big retailers have been lobbying other jurisdictions to implement these orders.

They are a really effective order that is placed by the Magistrates Court, where a workplace can apply for an order against an individual. Once that order is in place, it is then an offence for the individual to enter that shop or workspace. We continue to support and would like to promote these orders to workplaces out and about in the Canberra community. They are a really important tool that businesses do have available to them.

We also heard at the forum the business liaison officer at ACT Policing, who spoke very much about his experience working with retailers and trying to engage with retailers where they are having issues, where they are experiencing challenges or antisocial behaviour, or there are particular individuals that have been problematic in terms of how they have treated their staff. They were really calling for businesses to actively engage with the business liaison team at ACT Policing because they are there to help them and support them. They can take reports and information and work with the businesses if they are experiencing challenges.

ACT police also have dedicated youth liaison officers who are dedicated officers who are committed to working with young people, particularly some of the more vulnerable young people. And as Minister Pettersson has outlined in his speech—just the incredible work that has been occurring as a result of the raising of the age of criminal responsibility, with the Safer Youth Response and also with the Therapeutic Support Panel.

We have had a couple of round tables with all the relevant stakeholders involved in these reforms. As well, I attended an ACT police First Nations advisory group, which also had a round table on looking at young people and their interaction with the justice system. I so strongly support and feel passionate about providing therapeutic support to young people who are coming into contact with the justice system. These are some of the most vulnerable young people in our community.

We are really glad to be able to provide PCYC with some community crime prevention funding to top up their funding for their P180 program, which is also a nationally award-winning program that supports young people for a six-month period, often who have come into contact with the justice system, and really intensively works to divert them.

One of the last things that I will talk about—and just to put on the record—that is available for businesses is the restorative justice process for businesses. This is something that I think the restorative justice team has been really trying to engage the community on—that they actually exist—and there is a justice process for businesses. They can use restorative justice when crime affects their staff, affects their owners or their workplace. It gives people a safe place to ask questions, to understand what has happened and to talk about the impact of the crime on their staff.

Restorative justice can help businesses by helping staff heal after the crime, offering a faster outcome than going to court. It supports agreements to repair harm, such as paying for losses. It allows people to ask practical questions—for example, “How did

you get past our security?” or “Why did the offending crime happen?” And it encourages the offender to take responsibility for their crime, which also can fundamentally change outcomes for individuals. So there is a range of measures available to workplaces to be able to support them if they are experiencing crime or antisocial behaviour.

I would also like to thank the SDA for putting on that forum. I also had a subsequent meeting with them recently and would like to continue to work with them as they continue to address the challenges faced by retail workers across our country.

**MISS NUTTALL** (Brindabella) (3.52): I can empathise with Dr Paterson. I know that after the opposition’s response earlier this week, when they were acknowledging the one-year anniversary of raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility in the ACT, I was quite cautious to approach this motion moved by Mr Parton. I was worried because I have seen the divisive dog whistles about youth crime and the language that blames young people for the faults of system inequity in our society, rather than the policymakers who have not done enough to address it. Frankly, I am tired of it. I am tired of the lazy approach to youth justice. And as I said earlier this week, it is much easier to blame young people for ending up in the justice system or engaging in troubling behaviour. What is much harder is really interrogating the question of why and how these young people get to a point where they feel like such behaviour is their only option.

In reading this motion, however, and in taking it in good faith, I acknowledge the issues that it seeks to address and the real community concerns which it attends to. No-one deserves to go to work fearful. And our retail staff in Tuggeranong, many of whom—I believe around 40 per cent—are young people themselves, deserve to be kept safe. Ms Vassarotti has already been very clear about this, but a strategy that views young people simply as a problem to be solved is short-sighted and it is inaccurate. It does not honour young people’s experience as workers and it does not, I think, provide the road map for effective solutions.

In its original form, the ACT Greens think we would struggle to accept this motion. For the development of a strategy like this one that the motion proposes, there must be consultation with young people and there must be consultation with ACCOs. Ms Vassarotti’s amendment has included that. In the disability pride space, folks have an excellent term, a policy of “nothing about us without us”. I think this is a principle that can and should be employed across all policy areas that affect people. As decision-makers, we should be live to the risks of making decisions without the input of all those affected.

I absolutely back the principle that people should be safe at work. As a former library worker and the daughter of a teacher, I have copped it, and I have seen other people cop it, and it is awful. My experience is far from universal, but, actually, the worst serve I ever copped was from an older lady. I do not hold it against her, because it was clear there were circumstances underpinning her distress. It was still quite distressing for me and my colleagues, and a difficult way to finish off in libraries.

But the most effective way of keeping people safe at work, short-term and long-term, is restorative justice. It is the opportunity for change and an opportunity to address the

circumstances that drive people towards antisocial and harmful behaviour. It is not punishment for punishment's sake. Ms Vassarotti's amendments bring that core principle, I think, more strongly into this motion, and I back them wholeheartedly.

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH** (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (3.55): I have great pleasure in speaking on this motion and amendments today. I thank Mr Parton for bringing the motion before the Assembly so that we could have this important conversation, but I certainly support Mr Pettersson's amendment, and I believe we are also supporting Ms Vassarotti's amendments. I just want to echo the words of some of my colleagues about the importance of the reforms to raise the minimum age of criminal responsibility and to refute some of the comments that Mr Parton made the other day in his place in terms of the impact of those reforms.

Mr Speaker, we all agree—and I think we have seen it in this debate—that all workers deserve to be safe in their workplace. All workers deserve to be safe in their workplace, and this of course includes retail workers. It is one of the reasons that I have resisted, over time, attempts that the Canberra Liberals have made to split workers into different groups in terms of the type of protection that they deserve and the response that should be available to them when they are not safe in their workplace.

I was not, obviously, at the forum, but I have been in enough forums with people who have experienced a lack of safety in their workplace, and I have, in previous roles as Minister for Workplace Safety and Industrial Relations, worked directly with the retail unions in relation to their concerns about occupational violence. These are not new concerns, but they are escalating right across our community—not just occupational violence perpetrated by young people—as I have said, in many different contexts: the tolerance for anger that is uncontrolled; the tolerance for the kind of behaviour that would not previously have been tolerated in public; the tolerance for people bringing the kind of abuse that we see online into the public sphere. So I am pleased, in that respect, that the change in relation to access to social media will protect our young people from exposure to some of that behaviour online.

But I am also very pleased that Mr Pettersson is progressing the youth justice strategic plan that he has described in his amendment, that it is being informed by consultation with all of these groups and that that work is well underway. This work, of course, builds on the success in the last term of government. That success is not about three words. It is not about "raising the age". It is about creating a completely new pathway for young people under the age of 14 and, indeed, all young people, because the Therapeutic Support Panel and the processes that are available that supported raising the age of criminal responsibility are available to young people younger than 10 and older than 13.

It is one of the things I am most proud of, and it will continue to be one of the things that I will be most proud of that I have achieved in this place, not because we delivered on a three-word slogan but because we have genuinely delivered an alternative pathway for young people who are engaging in, or at risk of engaging in, behaviour damaging to themselves or others—an alternative pathway to get the support that they need to turn their lives around and to move away from a negative engagement with our broader society.

It is unfortunate that the shadow minister with responsibility for youth justice in the last term of the parliament was so intensely focused on arguing with me and Labor about whether or not there should be exceptions for 12- and 13-year-olds that they did not do the deep, strategic work that this important portfolio requires. And I am very pleased that my colleague Mr Pettersson is now doing that work.

We know that it makes a change. We know. We have seen the impact of the therapeutic supports that have been put in place for raising the age. But we have also previously seen the impact of the Blueprint for Youth Justice that was in place, when I came into this Assembly in 2016, that had seen a dramatic reduction in youth offending, in engagement of young people with police and in the number of young people in Bimberi. In fact, we got to a point where at one point, when I was minister, we only had four young people in Bimberi and no Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.

There are a lot of factors that go into that, Mr Speaker, and part of it is youth offending, gang activity and anti-social behaviour. It does tend to go in cycles, and this is a really unfortunate cycle that we now seem to be seeing in Tuggeranong. And I absolutely support further work with the community, the Tuggeranong community, to address that cycle of behaviour. But I do not think that being punitive about it and, as Ms Vassarotti said, putting young people back in handcuffs is the way to address that. The way to address that is through building relationships with those young people, understanding what underpins that antisocial behaviour and providing a more positive pathway.

I do want to say, in addition to the therapeutic support that has been made available as part of the minimum age of criminal responsibility reforms, which my colleague Mr Pettersson talked about, there are other things we have been doing as this government. My colleague Minister Berry set up the Muliyan flexible education program, which is supporting the young people who are disengaging from school and as a result engaging in problematic behaviour alongside of that, to provide a flexible option for young people to continue to engage in education.

In this budget we have provided permanent funding for Indigenous Allied Health Australia for their pathway into allied health careers for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. That might not, on the face of it, sound relevant, but when I have gone to the graduations for IAHA's academy program, I have spoken to young people and their families who have said to me, "I don't know where my young person would be if it wasn't for this program. They weren't feeling safe or engaged at school, and they were starting to go off the rails."

So there are a lot of things that we need to do and a lot of supports that we need to put in place for children and young people to ensure they can live their best lives and remain safe, strong and connected to their community and to their culture but that also work to keep the community safer. When young people are safer, when young people are supported into positive pathways, our whole community benefits from that. That is the very principle that underpinned the reforms of raising the minimum age of responsibility and that underpinned the therapeutic supports that we have put in place. And I am very pleased to have heard from a number of stakeholders, including Chief Police Officer Scott Lee, about the really positive impacts that those reforms have had in terms of some young people with quite challenging behaviour no longer being

involved with policing, or their antisocial and offending behaviour reducing, and from the chair of the Therapeutic Support Panel of what he has heard.

Is it perfect? Of course it is not perfect. Could we do more? Of course we can do more. That is why I am so looking forward to my colleague, Mr Pettersson, bringing forward the youth justice strategic plan and very much support his amendments today.

**MR WERNER-GIBBINGS** (Brindabella) (4.04): I will add a couple of words, to bring this into a bit more relief. I thank Mr Parton very much for moving the motion, and I particularly thank the ministers who have spoken about what has been done and how seriously the ACT government is taking the issues that this motion raises.

Unlike my colleague Ms Tough, I was not at the forum a couple of weeks ago. I was, however, at the meeting of the Tuggeranong Community Council that was held just afterwards. I want to highlight for the Assembly the work of the principal of Caroline Chisholm High School, Julie Dixon, who is currently on a tour of Tuggeranong, attending various forums and meetings, with some Caroline Chisholm High School students, to push back on the narrative of blame that she, her colleagues in the profession and her students feel is implicitly coming at them from these sorts of events. While it is probably not intentional, certainly, that implicit feeling does become explicit when comments appear online, blaming the crime committed by young people on students at Caroline Chisholm high.

The work that she is doing now was, in part, motivated by what she understood was discussed at the forum. She takes it very seriously, but that is not her experience. It is certainly not the experience of the young student in year 10 who spoke so well about what Caroline Chisholm offers its students. I am extremely grateful for the work that they are doing. There are three schools—one public, two private—that are much closer to the Tuggeranong town centre than Caroline Chisholm High School.

The public college is about the same size. One of the private schools is close to double the size of Caroline Chisholm high. The other one is about triple the size of Caroline Chisholm high, which is a really great school—the beating heart of its community, filled with enthusiastic teachers and ambitious students, committed to its Australian values-focused mission that is unique to public schools of an egalitarian, secular, tolerant, supportive, inclusive education for everyone.

I am extremely supportive of the work that Principal Dixon and her students are doing in Tuggeranong to help more of our fellow residents hear about what they are doing.

**MR COCKS** (Murrumbidgee) (4.08): It speaks volumes—the simple fact that this motion brought by the Leader of the Opposition has been supported by so many people across this chamber that I am the only other opposition member who has managed to speak so far. The enthusiasm with which it has been welcomed is right, Mr Deputy Speaker.

I would like to acknowledge that there has been a huge amount of work, not just across parties but behind the scenes, from members of the opposition. This is not one person's work. I want specifically to acknowledge the outstanding work of Mrs Morris. There is a huge amount of her work here. There is also the advocacy of Ms Barry, Mr Milligan,

from his sports perspective, and Mr Cain. I think I could name just about everyone on this side of the chamber, because it is a genuine—

*Members interjecting—*

**MR COCKS:** The government love to laugh when anyone else is doing work. Maybe it is because they are not doing the work that they need to do themselves. It is absolutely clear that things have not been going right, and it is not just about Tuggeranong. I rise today as both shadow minister for youth affairs and shadow minister for private sector employment and industrial relations.

Mr Deputy Speaker, it is a really interesting joint, dual perspective that you have to bring to an issue like this. On one side, we have to protect the wellbeing of those people working in retail—indeed, in every industry. We have to make sure that we have the structures and the strong responses set up so that we are not just leaving those people to deal with the impacts of other people's bad behaviour.

At the same time, we have to look at a motion like this and say, "This is about crime, not just young people." It would be lazy politics simply to blame the youths. Absolutely, it would be. That is why we worked very hard to make sure that the wording of this motion did not do that.

The government might like to build up a straw man, as they seemed to, in some of the speeches, and suggest that is what is happening here. Absolutely, it is not. Being young is hard. You struggle through navigating an astoundingly rapidly changing world, and you feel like everyone points the finger at you and blames you. That is not what we are interested in doing.

When you are young, there are vulnerabilities that you are not aware of, though. It is easy to take a wrong step and end up on a path that you never thought you would be on. God knows, I took enough steps that went close to that myself. It does not help if people just step away from the responsibility to give you a helping hand and guide you. It does not help if there is a completely hands-off approach to the world, because young people need some support.

As you are facing the challenges involved in growing up, there has to be something that, if you are taking those wrong steps, will bring you back on track. I shudder to think where I would have ended up if there were not. For me, places like youth centres were absolutely critical, to see some good examples around me. There are teachers, and the community. I am very lucky to have very good parents. Not everyone has all those things around them and a good community around them. For some people, it is sport.

This motion is about making sure that there are structures in place when things are going wrong, and that there are systems in place that will support young people when some of their decisions have been bad decisions. It is about making sure that those supports translate into the real changes and protections that workers deserve.

Things have not been going well. Things can be better. They need to get better. They cannot continue as they have been. And we cannot assume that a cyclical change is going to fix it. It needs action.

I commend the Leader of the Opposition for moving this motion because, clearly, this is something that has invoked great passion across this chamber. I cannot think of any occasion when something has been brought by a Leader of the Opposition that has elicited this much support from government ministers and members, the crossbench and independents. I am pretty glad that we are all on the same page.

**MS TOUGH** (Brindabella) (4.15): I could not pass up the chance of making Mr Cocks happy to have pretty much everyone in the chamber from this side getting up to speak.

**Ms Cheyne:** Not your side.

**MS TOUGH:** No, not your side, but I did not want to be left out over here. Part of the reason that so many on this side have spoken is that we hold two things to be true on this matter. Absolutely everyone deserves to be safe at work. I think that everyone on this side completely agrees that everyone deserves to be safe at work. No matter where we work and no matter what job we are doing, we should all be safe at work. We also do not think that young people, our kids, should be demonised by a group of young people—just a group of people—who are doing the wrong thing in our community. Not everyone should be lumped together when we are talking about that.

I have appreciated the positive things I have heard from across the chamber this afternoon—the genuine engagement and the amendments that have been moved by both Minister Pettersson and Ms Vassarotti. I know it is your first week back, Ms Vassarotti; you are contributing to the debate, and I appreciate that.

Mr Pettersson and I have had many conversations around retail workers and youth. We first met when I was a retail worker. I was a retail worker at two different Kmart stores in my time, and a community pharmacy, where we had a call button to the police because of behaviours we would get. We were not one of the pharmacies with methadone. We just had quite antisocial behaviour that would go on. While working in Kmart, both here in Canberra and on the Central Coast, I had friends assaulted at work by customers, in different circumstances. Luckily, the worst I was ever subjected to was some sexual harassment, so at least it was not physical, but I had colleagues who were physically assaulted as well.

That is why, when the SDA and South.Point separately reached out, and said, “Hey, do you want to come to this forum in Tuggeranong?” I said, “Of course, I will come there.” I will stand with fellow retail workers in making sure that people are safe at work, and in making sure we can do the best we can for retail workers. It is also about making sure that people have things to do, so that they do not feel that the only thing there is to do after school is to hang out in a shopping centre and wreak havoc on other people.

It was clear from that forum that things in retail have escalated. I want to echo what Minister Stephen-Smith said around behaviour that never used to be tolerated in our community. It started creeping in online, and it is now creeping into our public spaces. We need to do something about that. I think many of us here have been subjected to behaviour in public that, once upon a time, would not have been tolerated. It is becoming almost normal. We should make sure that that does not happen. That is coming across to people at work—people in the front line, people in retail.

I also want to talk about some positive things that happen for young people in Tuggeranong. It is my community; it is where I live. There are some positives going on. One of them is the Battle of the Bands, at the Tuggeranong Arts Centre. Last year, Mr Werner-Gibbings and I attended a heat together; we were judges. Miss Nuttall was a judge at another heat. I was also lucky enough to be at the final, where we had teenagers from not just Tuggeranong but across Canberra, with their bands, coming together on the foreshore at Lake Tuggeranong. Some of them played covers; some played original songs, and it was incredible. It was such a good atmosphere and such a good night. As someone who was in school bands and choirs, it was so much fun to be a part of.

I am really happy to say that we have secured funding again this year for the Tuggeranong Arts Centre to put on the Battle of the Bands. We will work with them to make this an annual thing in the Tuggeranong calendar, because it gives our young people something to look forward to.

With some of those bands, the youngest member might have been only 14. One band of young boys played their little hearts out on the guitar and drums, and it was just such a good thing. We do need things like this so that people can think, “Yes, that’s what I’m working towards,” or “This is the group I’m involved in.” It is about what Mr Cocks said as well—having youth centres, having places to be and a community to be a part of. I think that is really important.

I appreciate the work that the minister is doing in having places for people, and for the work that the Therapeutic Support Panel is doing for vulnerable young people, and for any young person that might be a little bit lost. We all make stupid decisions, as young people. Some of us have people around us to get us back on track. Some of us need a bit more guidance, and some of us do fall through the cracks. It is really important that we have things in place.

Mr Parton, thank you for bringing this motion. I have enjoyed talking about this. I have enjoyed talking about the experiences of a young person in retail and about things going on in our shared backyard of Tuggeranong.

**MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi) (4.21):** I am glad to discuss this issue today. It is a deep concern of mine. I know that, when I facilitated the appointment, with the Leader of the Opposition and the deputy leader, with a member of staff at South.Point, to introduce them to the issues that are real in Tuggeranong, it opened my eyes. Although it was Tuggeranong focused, it was crystal clear that this was not just a Brindabella issue. It is a serious, growing problem right across the ACT, and it is certainly time to put more of a focus on what is going on across Canberra.

I am a little disappointed that the “notes” focus only on Tuggeranong. As I said, we are not just seeing this problem in the south. It is happening across the board. It is an absolutely massive issue in Gungahlin and, of course, around other areas of my Yerrabi community. I know, from my time as Leader of the Opposition, that it did not matter where I went. We did a listening tour and took that bad boy around the entire ACT, and every business that we had the chance to speak to raised serious concerns about crime. I would like to have seen this motion recognise and have a broader focus across the entire ACT.

I am also disappointed that what we are seeing here is just another study. I understand that there are some amendments, and they are all very good things. We have had a number of these from the opposition this year, and what we want is action.

Retail crime is not a new issue. It is something that has been of growing concern around the ACT, and it is something that is not unique. Youth crime, retail crime, has been on the rise in cities across the world. I think it is good for us to know that we have evidence from those cities. We have seen the studies. We understand what these cities have done to tackle this problem.

There is an evidence base about what causes this issue. The most notable experience that I have seen is from North American cities, like New York, Los Angeles and San Francisco, in the post-pandemic years. These cities have had significant spikes in rates of shoplifting and other retail and antisocial offences, to the point where many of the retail stores were taking extreme steps to secure merchandise, such as locked cabinets for products like deodorant and toothpaste. Can you imagine that? Some of them simply shut down.

Obviously, Gungahlin and Tuggeranong are not quite at that point. I am not sure how Weston Creek is going, or any of the other areas, but I know it is pretty bad. It shows how a failure to contain problems like this can quickly spiral and have really damaging effects on local communities and businesses and, of course, as the Greens amendment speaks to, on youth and young workers—not just young workers.

The good news is that all these cities did have great success in combating the crime spikes. That is something to which we all want to aspire. It started with a recognition of the underlying problem, which was a small group of repeat offenders. We know that; that is the information that we got when we had our meeting in Tuggeranong. I know that the Gungahlin Community Council are looking to set up a similar roundtable. Hopefully, Mr Milligan, the other Yerrabi members and I will get an invitation to that, to discuss the real issues that are happening in Gungahlin. But it is a small group of prolific repeat offenders. If we cannot contain what is going on in our local communities, as I say, it quickly spirals to a point where people are feeling unsafe.

The good news, as I said, is that, with the crime spikes that these cities saw, it has turned around. It is the repeat offending that needs to be addressed. Once that underlying problem was recognised, these cities developed strategies that were adopted to identify and prosecute the prolific repeat offenders and help them to work out better pathways.

As Ms Tough was talking about, not everybody is going to continue to steal. When my brother—here is a small anecdote—was about 14, he decided to steal a mint pattie from the local ShopRite, I think it was, at the Melba shops. He was brought home in a police car, because the dad of his best mate, who he was with, was a police officer. You could bet your bottom dollar that he was never going to steal a mint pattie again.

With some of these first-time offenders, we do not often have that situation here in Canberra anymore, but there need to be programs for people who are on the edge. And we cannot forget that, when there are prolific offenders, there must be some consequences.

In some cases, in these cities across the world, it required more dedicated resourcing for police to identify and target those offenders—the prolific ones or the new people on the block. I understand that older kids are asking younger kids and paying them to commit crimes. This is the sort of behaviour that we hope to stop, to change, to turn around.

Cities that adopted these measures have seen local rates of retail and antisocial crime plummet, and that is fabulous news. In some cases, they have actually gone back to pre-COVID levels. Cities that had the same spike in crime rates that have not adopted those measures have not seen a decline. What worked is clear, as is what we need to do. There might be merit in studying offending pathways, of course, and these early intervention opportunities, but what we need right now is practical, proven intervention that will make an immediate difference to local communities and local businesses.

Again, I will go back to some of the young kids that are working late at night at Kmart. Having had kids working in retail and places like that, you do worry about your kids, when you send them off to work. It is dark, and you wonder about them getting to and from the car to the business, and what they are going to face on any given shift. As I say, and I echo the sentiments of many members in this place, it is critical that, wherever you work, you feel safe, and that a safe work environment is provided for you.

That is where our focus should be—on solutions that will make a real and immediate difference, rather than on studies, reviews and kicking the can down the road. It might make a difference, but it will be way in the future. Our businesses are crying out for help now. Our young people working in retail are desperate for help now. People who are shopping in our local community shopping centres want action.

I will be supporting this motion, but it is support in principle. I would have liked the “calls” to be stronger and—I will say it again—broader, and not so narrowly focused. The Leader of the Opposition should—I am sure he does—have a focus on all of the ACT, not just his electorate.

**MS CARRICK** (Murrumbidgee) (4.30): I rise to add my voice to the debate and the importance of retail workers’ safety. I support what has been said in this debate, including intervention to support our young people. They need things to do. They need things that are fun, like the Battle of the Bands that Ms Tough was talking about. I look forward to the release of the Youth Justice Strategic Plan, and I hope it includes lots of recommendations of places for young people to go and feel a sense of belonging and pride in their community—places they might find like-minded friends doing things they are interested in, to divert them from antisocial behaviour.

**MR PARTON** (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (4.31): I want to speak really briefly to the amendments and to apologise to Ms Vassarotti in that there was a bit of a breakdown in communication between my office and two others on the Liberal floor. I think you just got a grumpy Parton on a Friday afternoon, Ms Vassarotti.

**Ms Orr:** Can’t wait until the budget reply!

**MR PARTON:** I am sure you can’t! I just want to say that we are in favour of the

amendments put forward by Ms Vassarotti—the one that we are debating and the ones to come. We think they are well-intentioned. They do not radically change the substance of the motion, so we are with you.

**Ms Vassarotti's** amendment No 1 to **Mr Pettersson's** proposed amendment agreed to.

**Mr Pettersson's** amendment, as amended, agreed to.

**MS VASSAROTTI** (Kurrajong) (4.32), by leave: I move the following amendments to the motion, as amended, together:

1. Omit paragraph (1)(g), substitute:

“(g) young people are disproportionately affected by antisocial behaviour in retail, with individuals under 30 comprising around 40 percent of all workers;”.
2. After all text in paragraph (1)(g), insert:

“(h) an effective response to anti-social behaviour must protect workers and the community while promoting restorative justice services to those who may be at risk of engagement with the criminal justice system;”.
3. Omit paragraph (2)(b), substitute:

“(b) repeat offending or anti-social behaviour can involve complex factors including poverty, domestic violence, disengagement from school, poor supervision, substance use, mental health issues, negative peer influence and lack of meaningful structure;
4. Omit paragraph (2)(d), substitute:

“(d) the goal should not be to put more young offenders in handcuffs, but to top harmful behaviour early, protect victims and support young people to engage constructively with restorative justice services early-on;”.

**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) (4.33): I thought I would make just one small contribution. I was going to and then I was not going to, and now I am going to, simply because of Mr Parton's apology. I was reflecting earlier that, at the beginning of this week, Mr Parton corrected himself after saying something that turned out to be both egregious and wrong. It was about saying that a serving police officer had changed his account at a public forum because the minister's chief of staff told him to. That allegation went to the integrity of a police officer, a minister's staff, and this place, and I am glad it is no longer on the record. He has done very similar in terms of explaining what has occurred with these amendments.

There is something in this that is worth sitting with, and I would like to leave members with it today. In the heat of that moment, Mr Parton said something that was much sharper. It potentially would have involved an investigation. It was much sharper than facts could carry. On reflection, he came back and corrected it. That is not weakness—that is good judgement—and it is the difference between a firstly heated and doubled-down response, which he was giving, and then actually considering it, looking back and realising, “Hey, that was wrong.”

As it happens, that is kind of the entire idea behind so many of the contributions today. We do not build a justice system around a person's worst moment in the heat of the day or their lapse of judgement when they are a child. We try to build in room to reflect, correct and do better the second time. If we can extend that courtesy to the Leader of the Opposition, the only question that we really need to ask is whether we are prepared to extend that to youth—to extend it to 13-year-old versions of ourselves as well—not by pretending nothing happened and not by pretending it does not have an impact but by responding in a way that will most likely make sure it does not happen again.

**Ms Vassarotti's** amendments No 2 agreed to.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

### **Standing orders—suspension**

Motion (by **Ms Cheyne**) agreed to:

That so much of the standing orders be suspended as would prevent Notice No 1, Executive business relating to the presentation of the Urban Forest and Planning Legislation Amendment Bill 2026, being called on forthwith.

### **Urban Forest and Planning Legislation Amendment Bill 2026**

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

Title read by Clerk.

**MS CHEYNE** (Ginninderra—Manager of Government Business, Attorney-General, Minister for Human Rights, Minister for City and Government Services and Minister for the Night-Time Economy) (4.37): I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

I am very pleased to present the Urban Forest and Planning Legislation Amendment Bill 2026. It implements targeted amendments to the Urban Forest Act 2023 and the Planning Act 2023. This bill delivers on a significant 2024 election commitment that this government made to bring forward the review of the Urban Forest Act in response to community and industry feedback. The objective of the review was to improve the operation and application of the Urban Forest Act, including how it interacts with other legislation. Throughout its development we have worked to ensure that the framework operates clearly, proportionately and effectively alongside the planning, environment and public land frameworks.

The presentation of this bill comes shortly after our community came together in early May to celebrate Canberra Tree Week, which is an annual event that highlights how deeply connected Canberrans are to our urban forest. This bill ensures that we continue to protect and grow our urban forests while making sure the legislation is practical, clear and effective. The amendments are informed by extensive consultation across government and with targeted stakeholders, including arborists, industry

representatives of both the forestry and the construction industries, as well as community housing and infrastructure providers, and conservation groups.

The consultation heard that there continues to be strong support for canopy protection and for the objectives of the Urban Forest Act. Stakeholders did, however, identify opportunities for improvement, including: to make the process more transparent; to provide certainty about decisions earlier; to ensure that the outcomes are proportionate; and to reduce the number of decisions that are required to proceed with the development.

Before I turn to the first major component of the bill, I want to refresh the Assembly's understanding of how decisions about tree removals are made within the planning process. A development application can include a proposal to remove trees. Any DA that proposes removing trees is referred to the Conservator of Flora and Fauna for advice, and the conservator must provide that advice in accordance with the Urban Forest Act. Under the Planning Act, the Territory Planning Authority may make a decision that is inconsistent with the conservator's advice, but only where doing so achieves a better design outcome. In reaching these decisions, the authority meets regularly with stakeholders, including the conservator and their delegates, to weigh all relevant factors.

Essentially, under the current legislative framework, a DA provides a pathway for removal of trees that may otherwise not be approved for removal under the Urban Forest Act. We aim to resolve this through parts 2 and 3 of the bill that introduce a standalone pathway in the Planning Act for the removal of a regulated or public tree on design grounds, outside the development application and approval process. I thank the Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development for his support in developing this new process and for being a co-sponsor on this bill.

The bill introduces a new pathway for a person to apply to the Territory Planning Authority to remove a regulated or public tree where it enables a desired planning outcome to be achieved under the Territory Plan. This pathway may apply to exempt developments, single dwellings and larger mixed-use projects, where trees may present development constraints that can arise late in the design process. This does not create a new power. The Territory Planning Authority already approves the removal of trees on design grounds, but today that can only happen inside a development application.

The decision itself is sound; the process around it is neither transparent nor efficient. To ensure transparency in decision-making, the new design grounds process will be accompanied by a guideline—a statutory instrument made by the Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development after mandatory consultation with the Conservator of Flora and Fauna. The guideline will codify decision-making and promote transparency and consistency.

A draft of the guideline is now available online for consultation, so all interested parties can see how decisions will be made so that the policy settings within the guideline itself achieve the desired balance. The Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development and I both welcome any feedback on the guideline. That is available on the City Services website and, I believe, YourSay.

The guideline must be considered by decision-makers before a decision is made. The

consultation draft has incorporated advice from referral entities, including the Tree Protection Unit and the Conservator of Flora and Fauna, to ensure that the tree species is considered, including if it is part of a local ecologically-beneficial community or has another factor that would strongly favour retention. The reform does not lower the bar for removing any tree. The test and the environmental exclusions are unchanged.

What changes is timing. It brings forward a decision the authority already makes to an earlier, clearer point in the process, and it removes the costly redesign and delay that the review found occurs late in development. Environmental safeguards remain firmly in place. Registered trees, heritage trees, Aboriginal cultural heritage trees and other protective matters are expressly excluded. This continues to protect remnant trees within the endangered box gum woodland ecological community.

The requirement for a genuinely better design outcome is also embedded in this process. As such, it cannot be used to build a deck or to make minor aesthetic upgrades to a driveway. Approval to remove a public or regulated tree can only occur when the authority is satisfied that the removal of a tree facilitates the desired planning outcome under the Territory Plan. Any tree removed under this process must still enter a canopy contribution agreement under the Urban Forest Act. This keeps the hierarchy of the legislation firmly intact and ensures that, when trees are removed, they are replaced.

The second major reform addresses groundwork within the protection zone of a protected tree under the Urban Forest Act. The bill introduces a regulation-making power and inserts part 1A into the Urban Forest Regulation 2023 to prescribe different types of excavation that are not prohibited under the Urban Forest Act. These activities will no longer require approval.

The exemption increases the excavation thresholds if the groundwork is undertaken in accordance with the Australian Standards, allowing excavation to a depth of 200 millimetres instead of 100 millimetres and compaction of the soil in 20 per cent of the protection zone instead of 10 per cent. To undertake a development that is compliant with the Urban Forest Act, excavation to a depth of 450 millimetres is permitted if low to moderate impact techniques are used, such as hydro vacuuming, air spading and hand excavation.

Further, directional boring at a depth of 650 millimetres under the root system of protected trees will be exempt to install critical services. This will mean that more low-impact works can proceed without approval, such as installing pier and post footings. These works must be undertaken in accordance with conditions outlined in the regulation to protect the structural root zone and stability of the tree. Excavation or directional boring must not rip or tear roots; it must be undertaken with care.

The exemptions in the Urban Forest Regulation establish a more nuanced, tiered and risk based regulatory model. Low to moderate risk activities will be able to proceed without unnecessary delay, while higher risk works will continue to require a full assessment by qualified arborists within urban treescapes. Risks of damage to trees will be managed through legislative conditions, clear guidance material and strengthened enforcement provisions. Importantly, it will remain an offence to damage a tree under section 16 of the Urban Forest Act, with a maximum court penalty of up to 500 penalty units for engaging in conduct that intentionally damages the root system.

The bill also inserts new section 32A in the Urban Forest Act to create a fast-tracked minor works approval pathway. This will allow a person to apply for either major pruning or prohibited groundwork where the groundwork is not already exempt, and to get a decision within 10 business days. An application can be approved either on the spot or within 10 business days where the impact on tree health is minor. This updates the current test, which allows approval only where there is little to no adverse impact on the tree's health.

The bill also reduces legislated processing timeframes for applications to undertake damaging activities and prohibited groundwork, including tree management plans. The timeframe is reduced from 35 working days to 25 working days where a referral to the Tree Advisory Panel is not required. These changes improve predictability and responsiveness. They do not diminish the importance of accurately assessing the health of a tree.

The bill also amends the objects clause of the Urban Forest Act to better reflect the broader outcomes the urban forest supports, including public health, climate resilience, biodiversity, urban renewal and liveability. This provides clearer legislative context for decision-makers and the community. The updated objects better align the Urban Forest Act with the government's broader environmental stewardship and living infrastructure requirements.

The Canopy Contribution Framework remains central to the Urban Forest Act. It establishes a hierarchy that favours retention first, then replacement, and only then financial contribution. Where removing a tree is necessary, the lost canopy must be restored by replanting on site or a financial contribution is paid where replanting is not possible. The review found that most homeowners are replanting on site. However, it also identified circumstances where greater flexibility is required.

The bill strengthens section 36 of the Urban Forest Act by introducing a new ministerial power to set conditions for canopy contribution agreements. This allows a more flexible and responsive approach for Territory Priority Projects, supporting practical delivery while maintaining the principle of canopy replacement.

The bill also amends the regulation to replace homeowner and non-homeowner categories with tier 1 and tier 2 contribution categories. Owner-occupiers will remain in the first tier, and tier 1 eligibility is expanded to include applicants who are not undertaking development. It will also include certain entities that provide an essential public benefit to the community, such as education facilities, health services, public housing and registered community housing providers. Together, these amendments preserve canopy offset principles while improving fairness, flexibility and proportionality.

Community safety must always come first. Recent serious incidents have highlighted the risks posed when fallen branches are not identified and managed early. While trees are vital to Canberra's liveability, they must be responsibly managed to ensure the safety of people, animals or property. The community rightly expects the government to act swiftly and decisively in these circumstances.

The bill strengthens enforcement and public safety through the introduction of new division 5.4 in the Urban Forest Act. These provisions empower the Conservator of Flora and Fauna to issue rectification directions where a tree on leased land poses a risk to health or safety, or may cause substantial property damage. Trees that may cause injury or harm to another person on public land continue to be a priority for works crews and City Services. The new division creates a clear statutory pathway to intervene before serious harm or substantial damage occurs, rather than leaving the territory to react after the fact.

Section 104C introduces a strict liability offence for failing to comply with a rectification direction, with a maximum court penalty of 50 penalty units. The infringement notice penalty is aligned with the existing provisions in the Public Unleased Land Act 2013. These powers are modelled on and strengthen the existing powers in the public unleased land framework to address the dangers posed by unsafe trees. The bill also extends the prosecution timeframe for offences under sections 16 and 17 from one year to two years, recognising that tree damage is not always immediately apparent.

Where damage takes time to show, as it can with poisoning, this strengthens the territory's ability to investigate and to prosecute. In addition, a new strict liability offence for minor damage to protected trees is introduced, creating a more proportionate compliance framework by distinguishing between serious unlawful damage and lower level conduct, such as attaching structures. Together, these amendments are about stronger compliance, clearer accountability and ensuring that regulators have appropriate enforcement mechanisms to respond when safety is endangered or substantial property damage is likely.

Finally, the bill requires a statutory review of the act after five years. This reflects our recognition that the Urban Forest Act continues to operate within the dynamic planning and policy context, and to ensure that it meets its legislated objects.

In conclusion, this is a bill that reflects a simple but important truth: protecting our urban forest and delivering the homes, services and infrastructure a growing city needs are not competing objectives; they can and they must be achieved together. Canberra's urban forest is essential infrastructure. In the ACT, there are over 834,000 trees that cool our city, support biodiversity and health, build climate resilience, and define the character and liveability of our city. At the same time, our planning system must enable more housing, urban renewal, community facilities, schools, hospitals, and Territory Priority Projects to be delivered efficiently and fairly.

This bill ensures that the urban forest is protected and enhanced and that housing can succeed. By introducing groundwork exemptions and an improved minor works process, it allows the expert oversight within urban treescapes to concentrate where the risk to trees is greatest and it removes unnecessary delay, only where works have a low impact on a tree's health.

Together, these reforms maintain our environmental and climate protections. They ensure safety, they support productivity, and they help deliver the homes and the services our growing city needs. They keep the ACT on course to meet its ambitious commitment—a 30 per cent urban canopy by 2045—and to retain our status as an

international tree city of the world.

With that, I commend the bill to the Assembly.

Debate (on motion by **Mr Cocks**) adjourned to the next sitting.

## **Transport and City Services—Standing Committee Reference**

**MR COCKS** (Murrumbidgee) (4.53), by leave: I move:

That the Urban Forest and Planning Legislation Amendment Bill 2026 be referred to the Standing Committee on Transport and City Services.

I have moved that, notwithstanding standing order 174(a), the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Transport and City Services.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **Environment and Planning—Standing Committee Amendment to reporting date**

**MS CLAY** (Ginninderra) (4.53), by leave: I move:

That notwithstanding standing order 174(d), if the Standing Committee on Environment and Planning resolves to conduct an inquiry into the Urban Forest and Planning Amendment Bill 2026, the reporting date be extended to 28 October 2026.

**MR BRADDOCK** (Yerrabi) (4.54): I move:

Omit “Environment and Planning”, substitute “Transport and City Services”.

**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): The government supports what Mr Cocks proposed, as evident in the vote earlier, and we do not believe it is necessary for a date well into October to be included. We think three months is sufficient. If it turns out not to be, I give my word that the government will not be a jerk about it. We will work with the committee about what an appropriate timeframe might be. I do not really understand the justification for an extension of time until mid-October when we will be coming back to this place in September and we can discuss it then. So we will not be supporting the amended version of Ms Clay’s motion today, as much as I appreciate that it has been circulated with good intent.

**MS CLAY** (Ginninderra) (4.56), by leave: I will speak to the amendment and Minister Cheyne’s point. I would like to express the committee secretariat’s advice. I have acted on committee secretariat advice. Mr Cocks and I did not have a chance to talk. I am fine with it being referred to a different committee. The reason the committee secretariat has asked our committee to seek an extension is that the sitting calendar has such a lengthy

break and, if for any reason the committee cannot complete its inquiry, there will not be another sitting day between now and September to seek an extension. The committee secretariat has taken this routine advice and has sought extended inquiry dates for all committee inquiries at the moment, not with an intention to use them but because there is no further sitting day to do them. We are simply acting on our committee secretariat's advice. They are hardworking and we are trying to do the right thing.

**MR COCKS** (Murrumbidgee) (4.57): Ms Clay has just articulated exactly what I was about to say. We will be supporting the extension of time.

Amendment agreed to.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

### **Appropriation Bill 2026-2027**

[Cognate bill:

Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill 2026-2027]

Debate resumed from 10 June 2026, on motion by **Mr Steel**:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

**MR SPEAKER**: I understand it is the wish of the Assembly to debate this bill cognately with executive business order of the day No 3, the Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill 2026-2027. That being the case, I remind members that, in debating executive business order of the day No 2, they may also address their remarks to executive business order of the day No 3.

**MR PARTON** (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (4.59): I thank those who have gathered in the gallery. I do not know how many are here for the Greens and how many are here for ours! I rise to respond to another Labor budget chock-full of false promises, most of which will never be delivered. They certainly will not be delivered as they have been outlined in this document.

As a territory, we are in a massive red hole, and we are digging in deeper and deeper as each month goes by. This budget does not show us the way out. The government have taken decisions in this budget that will worsen the net operating balance by \$784 million, as compared to what they said in the midyear review in February. Sure, there are some additional revenue decisions made in this budget, and they raise an additional \$136 million over the four years. But the additional spending decisions will cost just shy of a billion dollars over the same period.

As Saul Eslake said on local ABC Radio yesterday morning, and I will quote him directly, "This government still has a very strong predisposition to spend money as more money comes in." And he is right. I will also quote Mr Eslake from the report he prepared for the committee examining our fiscal unsustainability. He said that we find ourselves in this dire financial situation entirely because of policies and decisions made by the current government.

The budget shows us that our total borrowings by 2029-30 will be \$23.7 billion. That

means that if we channel all the residential rates money, every single dollar paid by every home owner and every rental property, if we pool all that money together, it will not be enough to pay for the interest bill on our debt.

When Andrew Barr first became Treasurer at the end of the Stanhope era, we did not owe anything. Mr Barr inherited clean books. They are not clean now. The daily cost of interest payments now is \$2.3 million—\$2.3 million today, tomorrow, Sunday, Monday—and the amount of borrowings just keeps getting bigger. We need to understand that Labor got us here, with some help from the Greens. But Labor got us here, and we should never forgive them. We should not trust them to get us out.

The budget should lay out a framework through which a government intends to manage the territory's finances in order to make life better for people, to make their lives easier, to help them to get ahead. And this budget does not deliver that. The people of Canberra are doing it tough. They are working hard. They are raising families. They are caring for ageing parents. They are paying higher rates, higher rents, higher mortgages, higher fees and higher charges. They are trying to keep small businesses open. They are trying to find a home that they can afford. They are trying to get a child into the health system. They are trying to feel safe in their own city. They are trying to believe that this government is listening to them, and it is not.

Too many Canberrans have been left more vulnerable, not more secure—vulnerable to the rising cost of living, vulnerable to a housing market that has locked too many people out, vulnerable to stretched health services and longer waits, vulnerable to crime, antisocial behaviour and declining confidence in public safety. They are vulnerable to a government that keeps asking them to pay more while delivering less. This is the central failure of this budget. It does not meet the moment. It does not ease the pressure on families. It does not restore confidence in the basic services that Canberrans rely on, and it does not offer the change that this city needs now. The people of Canberra are paying the price for years of policy failure, drift and neglect under this ACT Labor government.

After a quarter of a century in office, Labor can no longer blame circumstance, bad luck, the Middle East or anyone else. But, of course, they do. The failures we see today are the result of decisions taken by this government, priorities set by this government and promises broken by this government.

We have had some extraordinary announcements from government about the delays in some infrastructure projects, including the Kingston arts precinct project, which, according to Mr Barr, is not the longest delayed project since self-government. I am not sure which one is. The Treasurer has told us that he is adjusting the infrastructure delivery program so that it is more realistic. Those are the Treasurer's words. We are making the infrastructure delivery program more realistic. Does that mean that the promises were not realistic when they were made? Is that what it means? I can only interpret it that way.

It is a bit like the promise of a surplus which has been made in every single budget since 2012 and never, ever delivered—ever. Nobody believes that this government will get back into black numbers in the third year of the forwards. Even the Treasurer does not believe it. He reads the talking points with conviction, but he does not believe it.

Nobody should.

The government's announcement on delays to infrastructure projects was the moment that the government finally conceded that they had run out of money. It was the moment that they conceded to the community that we are broke. It was the moment they admitted that they were wrong and we were right, all along.

We have been right on a number of things, Mr Speaker. We warned in 2012 that the residential rates would triple under the current tax reform, and it turns out that they have. They have tripled. Prior to the election in 2020, Mr Barr promised that the tram would get to Woden by 2025. We are halfway through 2026, and we are nowhere near it.

When it comes to the budget, a comparison of last year's budget and this one sees a number of stage 2B tram items being scaled back or disappearing from the budget papers. It was alluded to by Mr Braddock earlier. In last year's budget, there was a commitment to engage a technical adviser for detailed design from Commonwealth Park to Woden. That commitment does not appear in the current budget. It is not there.

When it comes to further spending on 2B, the budget only shows unconfirmed provisions of \$15 million to \$50 million in 2028-29 and no firm contracts behind them. After years of promises, there is still no cost, no contract and no completion date. The Chief Minister spoke on the weekend about the North Canberra Hospital project being the biggest infrastructure project this decade, which would suggest that there will be no forward movement on stage 2B of the tram until at least 2030.

This budget confirms what we have been saying for years, despite Mr Steel's non-answers in question time today. The tram to Woden is an uncosted pipe dream, with no firm capital commitment, no timeline and no price tag, just vague provisions years down the track.

Canberrans are sick of the spin that this government inserts in all of its budgets. Today, I can announce that we will introduce legislation to establish a charter of budget responsibility for the ACT. A charter of budget responsibility will strengthen transparency, accountability and fiscal discipline in the territory. It will help to ensure that governments cannot hide the true state of the budget, they cannot bury the long-term cost of decisions or ask Canberrans to pay more without actually showing them why.

Our charter will mandate budget honesty, fiscal discipline, intergenerational equity, year-to-year comparability, program-level transparency and appropriation integrity in law. It will require clear fiscal rules. It will require honest reporting of debt and interest costs. It will require the government to disclose unfunded commitments, temporary funding cliffs, whole-of-life infrastructure costs and fiscal risks.

It will require the budget to show when services are being funded with temporary money. It will require the budget to be comparable from one year to the next. It will require public money to be traceable between the program, project or budget measure that the Assembly approved. We will also pursue targeted amendments to the Financial Management Act to strengthen appropriation integrity. This is about restoring trust.

For the Canberra Liberals, our priorities are clear: cost-of-living relief, budget repair, backing small business, and returning Canberra to being a place where people can invest, employ and grow. They want to control business; we want to unleash business. Across Canberra, too many local businesses are being hit from every direction—higher taxes, higher rates, higher levies, more red tape, falling foot traffic, and rising operating costs.

The story we hear from business owners is very clear. This Labor government does not listen, does not understand and does not seem to care enough about the people who are taking risks, employing locals, investing their savings and keeping our town centres alive. The ACT has become one of the hardest places in the country to run a business, and it should not be that way. Business growth is weak, payroll tax is too high, commercial rates keep rising and land tax keeps rising. New levies keep appearing, compliance obligations keep expanding and, from 1 July, the payroll tax threshold will be lowered from \$2 million to \$1.75 million, pulling more businesses into that tax net. Every business that closes takes jobs, investment, local spending and community confidence with it. Every empty shopfront is a sign that something has gone wrong.

The Canberra Liberals government will take a different approach. We will treat small business as an economic partner, not a revenue source to be squeezed. We will look seriously at the compliance burden. We will review tax settings, we will make it easier to start, operate and grow a business in Canberra, and we will work with the business community, not lecture it from the sidelines.

A Parton Liberal government will back the people who back themselves. We are a party of aspiration. Earlier this year, I embarked on “Parto’s pub crawl”, which was a roaring success. You can come to the next one, Chief Minister! Canberrans from all walks of life told me that they have never been more worried about crime and the feeling of insecurity that is enveloping our community. Not a week goes by when a serious crime against a person is not reported in the media.

Earlier this year, I read out in the chamber a letter from a constituent sharing an incident involving her son, who was bashed while working in a local shop. I can tell you, Mr Speaker, that the video of that speech has now had some 48,000 views, with my office receiving many other stories like this. Labor is soft on crime and soft on tackling the causes of crime.

In May, my colleague and deputy leader, Mrs Morris, moved a motion calling for wider day-to-day wandering powers for our hardworking police. The “safer summer” trial proposed to give ACT Policing handheld metal detection wands in Canberra’s CBD, Civic, and Braddon. The pilot would provide valuable local evidence to determine whether a permanent “Jack’s law” style public-place wandering scheme should be rolled out in the ACT. Sadly, Labor members, Greens members and Mr Emerson voted against a practical safety tool being made available to use in public places.

When it comes to knife crime, it is very clear, based on the feedback that comes in from many sources, that there is a problem. Alarming, between 2020 and 2025, knives were involved in 21 homicides in the ACT. Therefore, a Parton Liberal government will introduce a “safer summer” pilot for the summer period 2028-29, should we win government in October 2028.

Canberrans should be able to walk through Civic without feeling intimidated, unsafe or unwelcome, and that is just not the reality for so many people. We know that a government-commissioned report recorded around 600 incidents of antisocial behaviour in the city centre over just 22 days. These incidents included alcohol abuse, offensive language, drug use, vandalism, harassment and threats towards members of the public. It is not an abstract problem. It is being felt in our streets, in our shops, in our public spaces and by families across Canberra.

At the same time, wastewater data shows methamphetamine use in Canberra has surged towards record highs. Meth is not just another drug. Meth destroys lives. It fuels violence, intimidation, theft and family breakdown. It places enormous pressure on police, paramedics, emergency departments, mental health workers, outreach services and families who are left to pick up the pieces, long after the headlines have moved on.

It is why a Parton Liberal government will re-criminalise methamphetamine. It is not because we have given up on people trapped in addiction; it is quite the opposite. We will re-criminalise meth because we refuse to pretend that a drug causing serious harm in our community should be treated as just another minor infringement.

The Labor-Greens experiment with the decriminalisation of meth has failed. It has failed families dealing with drug-fuelled violence, theft and intimidation. It has failed frontline police and small businesses left to manage the consequences. Most importantly, it has failed the people trapped in addiction, because a \$100 fine is not treatment, rehabilitation or recovery.

We will take a different approach. We will restore consequences for meth possession and use, because community safety matters. We will also strengthen the pathways into rehabilitation, outreach, mental health support and treatment, because recovery matters, too.

Mr Speaker, parts of Canberra are in serious decline and are decaying. You only need to leave this building and walk across the road to see graffiti-plastered shopfront windows, boarded-up shops and lease signs. A year ago, I tabled a report into graffiti management, after a self-funded study tour of local councils in New South Wales and Victoria, and I came away impressed by how active, practical and determined many of those councils were in tackling graffiti.

They did not just shrug their shoulders. They did not hide behind the question of whether a wall was publicly or privately owned. In places like Blacktown, Sydney, Wollongong, Queanbeyan, Melbourne, and the Yarra council in Melbourne, the approach is very clear: if there is graffiti in high-traffic, public-facing areas, remove it quickly, because that is how you restore pride. That is how you deny vandals the reward of seeing their tag staying up for weeks, months or even years, when it comes to this place.

Canberrans are speaking. Businesses, families and residents are telling us they feel less safe, they see more disorder and they want to know why the government does not seem to hear them. Businesses in the city centre and parts of Braddon already pay the City Centre Marketing and Improvements Levy. That money should be visibly reinvested back into the city, into cleaner streets, safer public spaces, better lighting, faster graffiti

removal, and practical support for businesses that are tired of carrying the cost of government neglect.

The Canberra Liberals will establish dedicated graffiti blitz teams to target Civic public and private buildings that face onto public spaces. We will work with businesses, property owners, community groups and volunteers, including organisations like Graffiti Busters, to provide the supplies, the safety equipment, the training and the coordination needed to clean up our city. This is not just about removing paint; it is about sending a message that Canberra is cared for, that people are being heard and that, under a Parton Liberal government, we will restore pride, order and confidence in our city.

Community safety is also about the health and wellbeing of our people, and that is why we have appointed dedicated shadow ministers for men's health and women's health, and why we are building policy around lived experience, frontline workers and community organisations. Canberrans must be able to access the health care they need when they need it.

For far too long, too many women suffering from endometriosis, chronic period pain and pelvic pain have been left to navigate a system that is fragmented, frustrating and too slow. Many women in the ACT have been told that pain is simply something to endure. Today, I can announce that a Parton Liberal government will expand endometriosis and pelvic pain treatment services at the Canberra Hospital. Debilitating period pain, chronic pelvic pain, missed days of work, study and family life, years of being told that it is somehow normal: it is not normal. Endometriosis and chronic pelvic pain are real, serious and life-altering conditions. They affect education, work, relationships, fertility, mental health and quality of life. Our health system should treat them with the seriousness they deserve.

The ACT does have services available, including the Canberra Endometriosis Centre, and a federally funded pelvic pain clinic. These services matter, but women continue to tell us that the care remains fragmented, inconsistent and difficult to navigate. The clinic we propose will build on existing services that provide a more comprehensive and dedicated model of care, bringing together pelvic physiotherapy, specialist pain care, endometriosis nursing, psychology, trauma and mental health support, specialised diagnosis and treatment, and improved local access to diagnostic equipment.

It will be backed by additional nurses, medical officers and specialists, supported by clear referral pathways and designed as a standing commitment—not a pilot, not a temporary program, not another patchwork of disconnected services. It is about saying to women across Canberra: we hear you, we believe you and we will treat your pain with the seriousness that it deserves.

The same principle must guide our approach to mental health and suicide prevention. Too many people in Canberra are suffering quietly, too many families are carrying grief, and too many warning signs are being missed until it is too late. As we have said in recent months, we flag our intention to introduce a suicide prevention bill for the ACT, a bill grounded in the belief that suicide prevention must be a whole-of-government responsibility. It cannot sit in one directorate. It cannot be treated as an afterthought. It must involve health, education, justice, community services, housing, police,

emergency services and the broader community sector. We will introduce this important bill before the end of the year.

Under a government that I lead, we stand by our commitment from 2024 in real terms regarding the size of the bus fleet, growing it to adequately serve our city and introduce a legislated service guarantee, ensuring that Canberrans get a reliable and frequent seven-day timetable—something that has been denied to them by this government.

Canberrans are hurting, interest rates are increasing and households are feeling the pinch, and this government chooses to inflict even more pain on Canberrans who are struggling to get by. At the height of the recent fuel crisis, we proposed 50c public transport fares as a way of helping to relieve that burden. Minister Steel rejected that idea. I commit to delivering 50c bus and tram fares across the entire network for every journey every day.

There are more than two years to come before we go to the polls again. Between now and then, I will announce a detailed policy suite so that Canberrans are very clear about what we would like to deliver for our city. Policy work in opposition is a hard slog. The government's policy-making machine is, without exaggeration, 100 times bigger than ours. They have the luxury of many more Assembly staff and, additionally, Treasury and the entire public service to assist with policy development. The opposition does not, and our staffing budgets are continually nobbled by government.

Notwithstanding that, we are aiming to be the government after the election of 2028 and, as such, we will be releasing that full suite of policies in the lead-up to that poll. Those policies will aim to deal with, among other things, the dire fiscal position that we find ourselves in. We are mindful of the fact that it took Labor 25 years to get us into this mess; it will take more than four years to get us out of it. It will require some discipline. It will require some out-of-the-box thinking. It would also be helpful if we had not experienced the debacle of the CIT contracts controversy. It would be helpful if we had not endured the \$77 million abandoned payroll and HR system debacle, or the \$64 million MyWay+ debacle, all under the watch of the Treasurer. We cannot afford to make mistakes of that nature, and we will not.

We are continuing to examine government expenditure line by line, and that work continues, including areas such as travel, consultants, contractors, communications and other discretionary spending. The budget shows us that the ACT government is still spending \$400 million a year on contractors and consultants. It also shows \$165 million in a single year for communication, travel and staff development. We will examine these areas carefully and sensibly, with a view to achieving further savings of between 10 and 25 per cent, and that includes considering a 25 per cent reduction in spending on travel and consultants.

The Queensland Liberal government has saved millions of dollars, and is set to save millions of dollars, in the infrastructure and procurement space by stripping back a framework similar to our Secure Local Jobs Code, because it was not allowing the government to provide value for money for taxpayers. The Canberra Liberals are extremely mindful of workers' safety in construction, and that will always be front of mind. But we are also mindful of our obligation to provide the best outcome for all ratepayers. If we are doing things in such a way that ensures a less-efficient outcome,

we should not do those things. There will be more to come.

Labor has won the last seven ACT elections, and that is a fact that should be acknowledged by us honestly. The people of Canberra made their choices, and they did not choose us. In a democracy, those choices must be respected. It is not for us to say that the people were wrong. It is for us to ask what we failed to do, what we must learn, and what we must now do differently. For too long, the Canberra Liberals have not convinced enough Canberrans that we were ready to govern. We did not always give people a clear enough reason to change, and that must change. Under my leadership, it will change.

But this government has changed, too. It is no longer the government it was 10, 15 or 20 years ago. It is tired, debt-riddled, out of touch and too comfortable with failure and mediocrity. The question is not whether Canberrans were wrong in the past. The question is whether the government is still right for Canberra's future and, on the evidence before us, the answer is no.

I have been listening to the people of Canberra for more than 25 years. I listened to them as a broadcaster, I listened to them as a local resident and, for the last nine years, I have listened to them as a member of this Assembly. When I entered this place, I promised to do all I could for the people of Canberra, to stand up for them, to speak plainly, to work hard, and to never forget who sent me here. I take no day in this place for granted. Every day, I am reminded of the privilege of serving a city and a community that I believe in. My aspiration is simple: to restore Canberra to its rightful place as the pride of the nation—a city that is well managed, a city where families can afford to live, a city where local businesses are backed, not burdened, and a city where suburbs are cared for, services work and people feel safe.

The Canberra Liberals will return responsible financial management to this territory. We will get debt under control. We will rebuild core government services stretched to the limit. We will cut red tape for business. We will give our suburbs the attention they deserve. We will restore housing affordability and choice. We will take crime and community safety seriously. The choice is very clear: more of the same from a tired Labor government, or sensible Liberal change, renewed hope and a stronger Canberra.

The people of Canberra still have over two years to wait before they can vote for change, and for many that will feel like an eternity. We will stand up for families, small businesses, young Canberrans, workers, public servants and suburbs that have been ignored for far too long. That is our promise to the people of Canberra. They deserve no less.

**MS CLAY** (Ginninderra) (5.25): This budget is better for the ACT Greens' influence, and it is better for Labor recognising that, as a minority government, the best pathway to achieving a budget which delivers on behalf of all Canberrans is to work with other parties in the Assembly, particularly the Greens. I would like to thank the Treasurer and finance minister and their offices for the spirit in which they entered these negotiations.

This was Labor's second budget on their own since the Greens moved to the crossbench. Last year, on their own for the first time in a decade, Labor made a deeply flawed decision by asking every Canberran to pay a \$250 health levy, placing the burden of

their budget failures onto everyday Canberrans. It became the headline of the budget for all the wrong reasons. The Greens said that levy was not fair, the Greens said it should go, and now it has gone.

But we went further than that. Not only did we take that burden off everyday Canberrans; we got the government to put it where it should be—by taxing big corporations who can and should pay more. That did not happen by accident. That happened because the Greens stood up, pushed hard and kept working—in negotiations, in the Assembly and alongside our community—to get a better outcome. And that is what it means to have Greens in the balance of power. When something is not right, we do not just point it out; we fix it.

We are living in a cost-of-living and climate crisis, and we need the ACT budget to address root causes. That is why, in our negotiations with Labor, the ACT Greens focused on protecting our people and our planet. We said that the budget must protect the most at-risk Canberrans with long-term funding and more funding for the community sector. We said that the Rent Relief Fund had to come back. We said there should be no health levy, and no other blanket, regressive levy.

We said the environment and our waterways need proper funding, as do the amazing organisations that care for the waterways and nature. We said Canberra has been leading the way on climate action, but with Labor solely in charge since 2024, we have flatlined. We said the budget needed to fund emissions reduction and our pathway to net zero. That is what the Greens asked for.

The budget came out two days ago, and I want to start with the good news about what we actually got. Labor's deeply flawed decision on that health levy is now reversed. The Greens fixed it. Through negotiation, the Greens have secured critical investment that strengthens our community and protects the services people rely on every day. The community sector is now better off because the Greens have worked continuously to advocate for the sector. That sector does so much to deliver a kinder and fairer city—from housing, to health, to disability support and more. It is crucial if we want everyone to be able to enjoy a reasonable standard of living.

Labor had promised an end to single-year contracts for community organisations and an end to the cliff edges, when one contract finishes without certainty of the next. Now there is a commitment to six months notice about the status of contracts prior to expiry. Labor has committed to achieving parity of conditions with the public sector, ensuring the community sector can attract and retain staff on pay and conditions.

As with all negotiations, we did not get everything that the sector needs. The community sector has seen a real reduction in its funding over the past 15 years, and during that time the need for funding has increased. We got a big uplift in funding for the sector. It is not as much as the Greens asked for, but it will help, and I understand ACTCOSS and the sector are deeply grateful.

The Rent Relief Fund is now back, in all but name, because the ACT Greens campaigned alongside the community to bring it back. It makes no sense to kick people out of their home because of a personal crisis. One crisis, like losing your job or facing a big medical bill, should not mean that you lose your home because you cannot make

the rent.

We got the start of stronger incentives for Canberrans to buy the least-polluting vehicles available. People who are making a choice to buy a new, more polluting vehicle will now contribute more to the cost. When you buy a new car, you can afford to pay more for the damage it will cause. Labor took some time to be convinced on this one, but they got there in the end.

The Greens have made sure that the environment stays front of mind for Labor. If we fail to protect our environment now, it will harm our native plants and our wildlife, and it will destroy our natural legacy. It will also hurt our own health. We are part of the environment. We need clean air, clean water and access to nature. They are essential for all of us.

Canberra is really lucky to have a strong network of environmental organisations with deep, on-the-ground expertise. Funding for ACT Wildlife will allow them to continue their vital work, including employing a part-time dedicated wildlife vet. We also welcome the new grant funding for community weed management. New funding for peak bodies Landcare and the National Parks Association is fantastic. They protect our natural environment, and that requires real support for our volunteer organisations and our rangers. There is so much more to do to look after our environment and to look after the people in the organisations who are caring for it.

We finally got delivery of the long-promised arts funding uplift. Canberra aspires to be Australia's arts capital. That is central to the government's arts strategy, but we cannot achieve it unless we recognise and reward our artists. The Greens insisted during the election, then in our confidence and supply agreement with Labor, and then in negotiations, on increasing arts activity funding by 50 per cent in real terms and increasing organisation funding by 25 per cent by the end of the term. This budget has delivered on that commitment. We will make sure future budgets deliver, too.

I am concerned about Labor's change of heart on the Kingston arts precinct, and I am still finding out from the sector what it means. I do not understand why government would start a decades-long project that they cannot finish, and I do not understand why they would not get proper federal funding for such a city-shaping precinct. It is short-termism.

Canberrans deserve great public health care, and that has to start with preventive health care—easily-accessible bulk-billed GPs, dental and mental health care, and the right supports in place for Canberrans in their early and later years. That also needs to include a freestanding birth centre, which has been called for by so many, for so long.

I am happy to hear that, after community and Greens pressure, the health minister has said she has asked Infrastructure Canberra to go back to the drawing board to get more beds for the new north-side hospital-based birth centre. But the government must not forget what the community actually asked for and what they have been calling for, for decades now. They have asked for a freestanding birth centre. If government wants to fix our outrageously high C-section rate, government needs to invest in a freestanding birth centre and the options that the community are calling for.

Federal Labor reforms to the NDIS threaten to undermine many of the supports that are so essential for the effective running of our health system, particularly for Canberrans with disabilities. This lack of provision for the removal of NDIS means friends and family members of people with disability will be forced to step into unpaid carer roles. More than 3,000 Canberrans who currently receive NDIS plan supports will lose them by 2031, according to federal Treasury projections tabled in the Senate on 27 May 2026. In addition, another 1,000 people who would have joined the NDIS by 2031 in the ACT will be refused altogether.

There are no plans for foundational supports to be ready in time. That means people without access to a support network will be left to fend for themselves. That is a situation that will make the ACT a much harder, more lonely and more desperate place for many people. Unmet disability support needs do not disappear because the NDIS disappears. Those unmet needs will show up here in the ACT. They will show up in hospital beds. They will show up in homelessness crisis services. They will show up in drug and alcohol addiction, as people self-medicate. And they will show up in our prisons.

Only this week, my colleague Laura Nuttall called on the government to block changes to the NDIS until other supports are in place. The government refused to do that. It could be a disaster. What do you think is going to happen to our people who need the NDIS? Who do you think is going to foot the bill? Let us be clear: it is about choices. A budget is about choices. For those who say we cannot afford it, one less submarine and a 25 per cent tax on gas exports would be a great way to pay for it.

I am also seriously worried about the climate. After a year of Labor flatlining on emissions, we do not even have a strategy anymore. We have some funding in the budget, but we need much more ambition for the climate. Our community are worried. Renters are worried about soaring energy bills. Parents are anxious about extreme heat in schools. Volunteers are doing essential work with short-term funding and long-term uncertainty. Young people feel the weight of decisions made today taking away their tomorrow and, for that, I am so sorry. The Greens will try our best.

In recent months, anxiety has reached fever pitch, as we have faced down a fuel crisis. We cannot be this dependent on foreign fossil fuel. The Greens welcome the increase in the Sustainable Household Scheme to help make it easy for households to purchase an EV or a cargo bike. Increasing that loan cap to \$20,000, where the cheapest new EV is now costing around \$24,000, will allow some lower income households to make a swap that has been out of reach. I have a family member at the moment who is in that situation, and it is transformative to free someone from the burden of weekly petrol prices.

Making it easier to buy a cargo bike also makes it easier for a household to switch from two cars to one, or from one car to none. If a cargo bike suits you, it is a great choice. They can carry the groceries home. They can cart the kids to school. The Greens have been campaigning for four years to get cargo bikes finally recognised as a real form of transport, like they are in other cities, and we are glad that now they are.

We need the fewest cars on the road possible and, to reach net zero, all those cars need to be electric. We have to guide buyers to the lowest-emitting option, preferably to a

zero emissions vehicle. That is also where our consumers want to go. We called for adjustments on car stamp duty, and Labor has brought in those nudges to help people make climate-friendly choices that will save them money long term.

We also welcome the extension of rebates under the Home Energy Support Program. That started under Greens minister Shane Rattenbury. It supports lower income households to reduce their energy costs, and it continues the renters' home energy advice program. We are pleased to see more funding dedicated for heating and cooling in schools. That is essential climate adaptation. It protects our students' learning conditions. It supports our path to net zero. I have campaigned for this for individual schools. My colleague Laura Nuttall has campaigned for it for all of our schools. And it is great to see Labor finally acting.

That, for us, is the good news in the budget. Now for the work ahead. The Greens will never stop fighting for our climate, and we will never stop fighting for our community. The government needs to get serious about getting off gas, and ensure our city is not left with stranded gas assets after 2045. We need to decarbonise our transport system, reduce transport emissions, and slash petrol and diesel costs for our people. We need urgent climate adaptation investment if we are going to keep people safe in the face of extreme weather and climate-induced natural disaster. And we need to commit to a duty of care for future generations.

That is why the Greens are so disappointed in the lack of progress on light rail. My colleague Andrew Braddock has been so vocal on this. It is the only way we are going to move a lot of people around a growing city and make sure that we are not all stuck in traffic. This budget pushes funding for the next leg out to 2029. Commonwealth Park to Woden will not come until long into the next decade. My colleague Andrew Braddock today tried to get a promise that the next stage would be delivered by 2032, and we could not get that.

The government are refusing to even begin planning stage 3 to Belconnen. They will not even tell us where the route will go, so that the rest of our development can be planned around it—the hospital, UC and new homes. It is a foolish way to run a major project. The government needs to build all of stage 2, including the Mawson link, and plan stage 3 from Kippax to Brindabella Business Park, and they need to do that project on a rolling basis, without all of this stop-start work.

We are also worried about the cost of public transport in this cost-of-living crisis. In October last year, the Assembly passed a Greens-led motion to make fares free for all concession card holders and for students. This would have reduced a cost barrier for those facing one. It would have made new habits to use public transport. It would have helped to reduce our climate impact. But Labor have yet again turned their back on an Assembly motion that they voted for, and they have refused to implement it.

I want to turn now to some new revenue measures. To provide great services, the government needs to raise revenue. The best way to do that is to get our fair share of federal funding, and to tax those who can afford to pay. Tax concessions should be fair and efficient. Last year, non-government schools received almost \$50 million in ACT tax concessions through exemption from payroll tax, rates and the fire and emergency services levy. Meanwhile, our public schools are struggling. Our private schools are

subsidised by the federal government to an extent not copied in any other country in the world.

We cannot keep going with these kinds of tax breaks and subsidies when resources in the public system are so stretched. Victorian Labor removed concessions for private schools charging high fees. That made no impact on demand. UK Labour introduced the UK's version of the GST, levied at 20 per cent on all private school fees, in January 2025, and they reinvested that money in recruiting teachers in the government sector. They raised over \$1.5 billion to be reinvested back into their government schools.

We think it is time to look at this here. For schools charging average fees over \$10,000, we should look at their government tax concessions. Government needs to talk to parents, the community, schools and the union about this. Low-cost private schools should be exempt, but it is time that government did the modelling and the consultation to see how this fits into future budgets.

The ACT government also need to engage with their federal mates and make sure we are getting a fair share of funding for our public schools and our school infrastructure. ACT government also need to follow through and bill the New South Wales government for New South Wales students in our schools here. The government will have to act if they are going to save the public school system. Yesterday's strike and censure showed a government that had failed to listen and engage. It is time to listen and engage.

The Eslake report also showed that we tax less on gambling than the national average. That nine per cent gap leaves \$60 million on the table. Our government then hands over an additional \$8 million to the horseracing industry each and every year. This is nuts. Government must stop funding the horseracing industry. If people do not want to pay for it, please listen to them, and do the work on a gambling tax. Why are we taxing less than the rest of Australia? We should raise money to fund essential services, and we should channel some of that money into reducing gambling harm. In a budget of "difficult choices", I am baffled as to why government has left this one on the table. This is not a difficult choice. This is a really easy one. It is almost as if the Labor government is reluctant to tax and regulate the gambling industry.

It is also time to get our fair share of federal funding. Our housing debt is now at \$56.7 million. We have already paid down almost \$200 million on principle and over \$200 million in interest—almost \$400 million in funding which instead we could have invested in hundreds of new public homes. Let us get the rest waived. South Australia and Tasmania got waivers. Why can't federal finance minister Katy Gallagher do this for her own seat?

We are missing out on federal funding in so many ways. We get a \$60 million adjustment for the half-billion we lose because we cannot tax commonwealth public servants. The commonwealth health contribution has risen, but it still falls short of our expenses. The commonwealth now want to cut the NDIS, having made the deal with the states earlier that they would pay for it. We do not get funding for many of those city-shaping projects for the capital of Australia, and the ABS continues to undercount our population, so we get less funding than we need to provide services for our people. It cannot continue. ACT Labor, you need to talk to your federal mates. You need to do

better, if you all expect to hold your seats.

We also need to start making some deep structural changes. The Eslake report has identified big structural problems in the budget. Other cities have managed progressive economic reform—cities like Preston in the UK and Cleveland in the USA. Just a couple of months ago, Scotland unanimously passed a bill to require Scottish ministers to reform their economy in a progressive way to build wealth for Scottish communities. The ACT can do that, too. The idea is that wealth stays in our community, rather than being extracted by multinational corporations.

I am releasing a discussion paper on how community wealth building could work here in the ACT. We want to have this conversation with Canberrans; then I will table legislation to bring the benefits right here. The Greens want a fairer country, where the top one per cent are paying their fair share for the public infrastructure and the services on which they have built their wealth. We should be taxing billionaires. We should be levying a 25 per cent gas export tax. Australia is a resource-rich country. We need that money for climate action, education, health care, housing, active travel, public transport, and more.

As our cost of living is going up, we need better negotiation up on the hill. We have a Labor Treasurer on the hill; we have a Labor Treasurer down here. They both bear significant responsibility. But ACT and federal Labor are still clinging on to old beliefs. They are still protecting billionaires. They are still talking about the fallacy that wealth trickles down. The rest of us can see that that does not work. Wealth is hoarded at the top, and it needs to be taxed properly.

Here in the ACT, we still have some of the most unaffordable housing in the world. It has been turbocharged by years of negative gearing and capital gains discounts. Thanks to Greens pressure and community pressure, federal Labor has taken some steps forward on this. Right here in the ACT, the ACT Greens legislated for rent caps. That means our rents are growing slower than anywhere else in the country. But the rent is still too damn high.

ACT Labor have allowed the public housing waitlist to grow because they will not build public homes fast enough. We have insurance and strata costs skyrocketing because of the cost of climate change and the US-led war—a war that federal Labor supported wholeheartedly, with zero consideration for the impact it would have on our people. All of that means stress, homelessness, health problems and climate disaster.

The ACT Labor government need to tackle these challenges. There has been some progress in this budget; I welcome it. We have some investment in the community sector, the environment and climate. We have a tilt towards preventive health. But so many parts of ACT government are failing. They are failing to deliver the services we need. They are failing to deliver adequate public housing. They are failing to invest in teachers sufficiently to keep our schools open.

ACT government need to continue working with the crossbench. They need to work harder to get our fair share of federal funding. They need to listen harder to the community. ACT Labor, please remember that you work for Canberrans. You do not work for vested interests. We need to see more reform in next year's budget.

Debate (on motion by **Mr Cocks**) adjourned to the next sitting.

## **Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill 2026-2027**

Debate resumed from 10 June 2026, on motion by **Mr Steel**:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

Debate (on motion by **Mr Cocks**) adjourned to the next sitting.

## **Libraries ACT—opening hours**

**MR CAIN** (Ginninderra) (5.47): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) the Minister for City and Government Services announced last Friday significant changes to public library opening hours across Canberra;
- (b) the changes include the removal of Sunday and night time opening hours across the library network and the reduction of evening opening hours on weekdays;
- (c) libraries at Kippax, Civic and Erindale will lose all weekend access under the new arrangements;
- (d) public libraries provide important access to literacy, study spaces, internet services, community connection, children’s activities and safe public spaces for many Canberrans;
- (e) weekend and after-hours access is particularly important for working families, students, seniors and residents who cannot access library services during standard business hours;
- (f) many Canberrans already face increasing cost of living pressures and rely on libraries as one of the few remaining free and accessible public community services; and
- (g) reductions in access to public libraries risk disproportionately impacting outer suburban communities and vulnerable Canberrans;

(2) further notes that:

- (a) the Government has framed these changes as a “redistributing” of opening hours despite the overall reduction in total accessible hours across parts of the network;
- (b) no clear public evidence has yet been provided demonstrating that the changes reflect community demand rather than operational cost-cutting;
- (c) ACT libraries are among the Territory’s most valued public services and should be strengthened, not scaled back; and
- (d) the changes were announced without a clear commitment that overall staffing levels, service delivery and community programming will be maintained or expanded; and

- (3) calls on the Government to:
  - (a) immediately reverse the decision to abolish Sunday library opening hours across Canberra;
  - (b) guarantee that every library branch retains some form of weekend access for local communities;
  - (c) restore evening opening hours to ensure working families, students and commuters can continue to access library services outside standard business hours; and
  - (d) rule out any reduction in frontline library staffing, community programs, literacy services or public access as part of these changes.

The ACT government has announced significant reductions in and restructuring of ACT library opening hours, including the removal of Sunday access across the network, reductions to evening hours, and the loss of all weekend access at some suburban branches. The announcement was quietly released by Minister Tara Cheyne late on a Friday afternoon, on 5 June, with minimal public scrutiny despite significant impact on community access to a public service.

Libraries are one of the few universally accessible public services relied on by families, seniors, students and vulnerable Canberrans for literacy, internet access, study, social connection and community participation. A letter in the media today stated that Einstein said that the most important thing to know is: “Where is the library?” I think we get why he would say that, but, of course, it is one thing to know where the library is, but, if it is not open, it does not help you very much.

The changes have raised concerns that community access has been reduced under the guise of operational redistribution and cost pressures. The media release from Minister Cheyne on that Friday afternoon before a long weekend states:

“Our libraries are vital spaces for learning, creativity and connection,” Minister Cheyne said.

“Redistributing hours to match peak community use rather than spreading them across lower-use periods means our hours and services are aligned with the community’s needs.”

So-called “community needs”. There is no empirical evidence. I will look at the word “redistributing” for a moment. If you have, say, a bowl of fruit and the fruit is allocated to members of a group or a household, from my understanding of that word, you would say, “Hang on. We’re going to do something different. We’re going to redistribute them.” Do you know what it does not mean, Mr Assistant Speaker? It does not mean you take some of it away. It does not mean you reduce the hours. It means you redistribute; you re-allocate. But we have had about a dozen access hours cut from our libraries across the city.

I am not quite sure why the minister, who should be fairly familiar with the English language as Attorney-General, would not understand the meaning of the word “redistribution” compared to, for example, “reduction”, because that is actually what has happened. It is a simple case of looking at the numbers. There is a bit of spin-doctoring going on with the announcement released on a Friday before a long weekend,

perhaps hoping that not too many people would notice, but plenty did.

Members will speak to this motion and have amendments of their own, which I will address in turn. But the goal of my motion, which the Canberra Liberals are bringing forward, is to force transparency around government decision-making and publicly challenging the reductions to community access, and to keep libraries open, as they are open now at the very least. Why are we losing our weekend access across the libraries in our city?

The stakeholders most affected by these changes include seniors, students, working families, children, jobseekers, culturally diverse communities who value having written material in their own language, residents without reliable internet access, and outer suburban communities that rely heavily on local library services. Reduced hours disproportionately affect people who cannot access services through standard weekday business hours. That is why we value our weekends. Guess what: the weekend is when most people are not at work—and most people in our community work to earn an income—so the weekend is actually a very unique, distinct and prized part of the week, when people are not at a workplace but have the opportunity to go to a library. But not after these changes are in place.

The motion that I present is designed to pressure the government to pull back on these reductions and stop cutting hours—to stop cutting hours on weekends over most of the libraries and to show us some hard, empirical evidence. I appreciate that I had a briefing with the minister today, and I have had the benefit of meeting with many members as well through the day, but I have to say that I am unpersuaded. My view is that the reason for these cuts is that the budget has problems. The government have run out of money, they are looking for some easy savings, and they think this is an opportunity to do that.

I endorse the motion as presented but will address some of the amendments that are coming. I will look at those in a favourable light, with a bit of commentary involved. I commend the motion—as is, though—to the Assembly.

**MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (5.55):** Let me begin by highlighting what is at stake here. Libraries are essential public infrastructure and cornerstones of our community. They are places of learning, connection and refuge. For many Canberrans, they provide access to literacy, digital services, study spaces and community programs. They are safe, welcoming environments, particularly for those who may not have access to such spaces elsewhere. Increasingly, libraries function as critical third spaces outside of home and work, particularly for those facing rising cost-of-living pressures, social isolation or housing insecurity.

Furthermore, in a climate where extreme heat and smoke events are becoming more common, public spaces such as these truly matter. Our libraries serve as climate refuges and must remain available to support the community during periods of environmental stress. So, when we are talking about reducing opening hours, particularly on weekends, we must be clear-eyed about what that means. It means reducing access to one of the few universal, frontline community services.

The upcoming changes to library opening hours are an imperfect but considered attempt to better match service delivery with both workforce capacity and community usage

patterns. The government has pointed to lower community usage on Saturdays and Sundays across the library network as rationale for these changes, but that raises an obvious question: why is usage lower? Is it because there is genuinely less demand or is it because services have not been designed to meet people where they are at?

We know that programming drives participation. We know that consistent and reliable opening hours build community habits, and we know that early closures and limited offerings can suppress attendance. So we must be careful not to confuse correlation with causation. For example, with fewer or no public programs running on a weekend, of course library attendance will be lower. This perceived lack of demand does not necessarily justify further reductions in opening hours; it may point to a need for better service design.

Labor's announcement does not fundamentally address the risk of a one-dimensional, demand-led model. If applied narrowly, models such as these can lead to a cycle of service reduction, where lower usage justifies fewer hours, which in turn leads to even lower usage. Such important unaddressed considerations include: where is the consideration of expanded programming to drive weekend engagement; where is the benchmarking against other jurisdictions that maintain extended hours; where is the analysis of how libraries function as part of a broader ecosystem of accessible third spaces across the city; and where is the analysis of the value of these opening hours for vulnerable Canberrans? If we are serious about maintaining strong, accessible public libraries, we need to ask these questions before cementing changes that may be difficult to reverse.

Mr Cain's motion recognises that concern within the community, and I wish to acknowledge that. It calls on the government to ensure that any changes to library hours are genuinely in the best interests of both the library staff and the community, not simply the most convenient response to the current budget model. Once access is reduced, it is not easily restored, and the communities who rely on these services deserve better than that.

There is also a broader equity issue at play here. For many Canberrans, particularly those in the outer suburbs, access to third spaces is limited or inaccessible. As we know, public transport on weekends can be infrequent, with buses arriving only every couple of hours. Reducing weekend library access in these areas risks disproportionately impacting those who rely on libraries the most.

While the government points to workforce pressures—and those pressures are real—we must also acknowledge how we got here. A failure to adequately invest in the library workforce over a period of time has led to instability, and now, instead of addressing that problem at the root, we are seeing a reduction in frontline service delivery. That is a choice. It may be presented as reform, but many in the community will see it for what it is: scaling back of services to fit within the financial envelope.

Ms Cheyne and her office have very correctly pointed out in private—and I anticipate she will do so in this debate—the value of the independent working group process in order to regain the trust of library staff and, in collaboration with the same staff, turning the library service around. I wish to very clearly give my thanks to all Libraries ACT staff for the valuable work they do on behalf of the Canberra community. I particularly

thank those who have contributed to this improvement in service through the independent working group process and have worked tirelessly to address the issues that were identified. I want to make sure that my amendment, which I will move shortly, reflects this gratitude.

I also state that, whilst the workforce is a critical contributor to the success of the library service, I am also motivated by concern for vulnerable Canberrans who use the library service, and the accessibility of services in both a spatial and temporal manner. Ms Cheyne will likely point out in her speech that it is not possible to pause the announcement as it has already been made and staff are already working to implement the changes, and that we should trust the process by which the IWG developed these announced changes. My concern is that the IWG process was constrained from considering options that may have exceeded the funding envelope. Hence, I seek that further information on options be made available to the Assembly, not because I do not trust the process but because I think it is only appropriate for us here in the Assembly to at least understand the options and their implications as we discuss the budget. The members who wish to see a particular branch open at a certain time of day should be able to see the budget implications of that option and then take accountability for any additional budget cost and/or the trade-offs that the change may incur.

My amendment seeks to pause implementation to ensure there is transparency, accountability and a clear focus on holistic outcomes that inform budget decision-making here in the Assembly. We need a library system that is both widely accessible and reliable—one that supports its workforce while continuing to meet the needs of a diverse and growing community; one that is financially sustainable now and in the future. I am sure we all have different perspectives on exactly what this looks like, but let's have an informed debate in this place with full awareness of the options and their implications.

I too would like to thank the minister and her office for providing me with a thorough briefing on this topic, and I thank Mr Cain for his work on this motion and the discussions we have had over the past few days.

I move:

Omit paragraph (3), substitute:

“(3) further notes:

- (a) a library service is not measured by the visitation date but also the services it provides to vulnerable Canberrans;
- (b) visitation data is not the sole metric to be used for Government decisions on library opening hours and is also influenced by:
  - (i) what programs and activities are scheduled and when;
  - (ii) the regularity and consistency of opening hours;
- (c) making decisions based purely off visitation data will likely lead to a diminishing service for the Canberra community; and
- (d) that investment is required to improve the range of service offering and accessibility of the library service;
- (e) that the Independent Working Group's work in developing the

announced changes has addressed the issues identified including:

- (i) the previous rostering model was operationally inflexible and a source of inequity between staff;
  - (ii) the data substantiated the need to review library opening hours and days of operation to better reflect catchment demand and staffing capacity;
- (4) calls on all members of the Assembly to
- (a) express their appreciation to ACT Libraries staff and in particular the Independent Working Group for their work in improving the ACT Libraries service; and
  - (b) acknowledge that calls to keep certain branches open for longer into the evening or weekend will require additional supplementation to resources;
- (5) calls on the Government to:
- (a) rule out any reduction in frontline library staffing, community programs, literacy services as part of these changes;
  - (b) prioritise the implementation of any-time collection of reserved items;
  - (c) not reduce evening hours until implementation of any-time collection of reserved items;
  - (d) ensure every Libraries ACT branch remains open providing accessible third spaces for Canberrans and that borrowing, collections, digital services, room bookings and regular library programs continue;
  - (e) pause the implementation of any proposed hours changes until the passage of the Appropriations Bill;
  - (f) provide the following additional information to the Assembly by the first sitting day of September 2026 on the proposed changes:
    - (i) investigate conducting more programs and activities in evenings and/or weekends for the benefit of Canberrans who cannot attend a library during business hours;
    - (ii) evaluate the accessibility of third spaces over the weekend across all Canberra regions to ensure Canberrans have fair and equitable access to thirds spaces should any branch not be open on a Saturday or Sunday;
    - (iii) ensure branches remain available to support the community during heat, smoke or other emergency conditions, including activation as heat refuges when called on by the Chief Health Officer;
    - (iv) specify the criteria or conditions on which ACT libraries branch would be opened as a heat refuge;
    - (v) publicly publish the findings of LACT's strategic review into operating hours;
  - (g) provide business case for options to extend opening hours and locations above and beyond what was announced along with accompanying amendments to the 2026-27 Appropriation Bill to allow for Assembly consideration and decision.”.

**MR EMERSON** (Kurrajong) (6.02): I would like to speak to both the motion and the amendment. First of all, I would like to thank Mr Cain for bringing the motion forward today. Libraries are a vital third place for members of our community to gather, connect and learn. In the context of increasing concerns about the availability of community facilities across the ACT, as demonstrated by responses to the risk of losing valued community assets like Big Splash and the Braddon bowling club sites, it is important to acknowledge that the proposed reduction in library opening hours represents another potential blow to essential community services for Canberrans.

The importance of our libraries is exactly why it was so concerning to many members of our community and members of the Assembly when they learnt about the number of unexpected library closures last year and reports of a problematic work culture. The Libraries ACT Independent Working Group arose in response to these concerns and followed a motion by Mr Braddock, to his credit. The working group was a process I imagine most members supported as a way of ensuring the stability of our libraries. However, I am doubtful that the proposed revision of opening hours, especially the impact on weekend opening times, was something people across our community expected or something the majority of their representatives in this place wanted.

The report from the working group recommended a strategic review of operating hours which would explore reduced branch hours, although I note it did not mention weekend hours, but that strategic review has not yet been made publicly available. Without knowing what the review said, it is impossible to assess the merits of the proposed changes to opening hours that have been announced by the government.

For that reason, I am supporting Mr Braddock's amendment to Mr Cain's motion. This call to pause the proposed changes to give the Assembly time and the information needed to actually assess whether these changes are warranted is something we should all support. It does not ask for a complete reversal; it instead asks that we are given what we need, as representatives of our community, to properly scrutinise what is a significant shift in access to essential facilities, because it is clear from the public response we have already seen to these changes that they do not align with community expectations.

Beyond these concerns, I believe the debate today is also symptomatic of a broader issue which speaks to a lack of clarity regarding exactly how we think about our community spaces and our community facilities, including public libraries. I think that is what Canberrans are actually really upset about. We do not fund libraries because of their viability; we fund libraries because it is a public good. If we are making decisions to shorten opening hours because there is a perceived lack of demand, let's look at how we increase the value of our libraries to our community, because I am also constantly hearing from Canberrans, as I am sure other members are, that they want to see more no-cost third spaces in the ACT, not fewer of them.

Is it any wonder that libraries are underutilised, when we had so many unexpected closures last year? Mr Braddock touched on this. All it takes is one failed visit with a screaming toddler to a library which is unexpectedly closed, when it is supposed to be open, to put people off. I may or may not be speaking from personal experience on that! Unexpected closures obviously have an impact on people's behaviour. If a young person or an elderly person plans their day, using public transport to make their way to

the local library, only to find it closed when it ought to be open, they might decide to never bother making that trip again, which, of course, impacts usage rates and both the perceived popularity and the viability of our libraries, and it potentially spreads the sentiment that our essential community services are not reliable, which will absolutely have an impact on demand.

I know that proposed changes are intended to address these unexpected closures, and I appreciate that, but the point I am making is that, if we underinvest in services, people will use them less, and we are making a big mistake if we then use that as justification to further reduce investment in those services. I have spoken before on how the logic of reduced demand has produced perverse outcomes for other essentials, like public schools, and I am wary of using this as catch-all justification to reduce provision of these services without thinking about why people might be using them less and how we can address that—if addressing that is in the public interest, as in this case I believe it is.

We are in the middle of a loneliness crisis, and people consistently tell me that this is in part due to a lack of spaces for community connection. People are crying out for ways to engage and connect with each other. We need to restore trust in the reliability of our community facilities and in their value and to think innovatively about what people might need from them, which should include considering how we can turn our libraries into places where more people want to gather and connect. Introducing toy libraries to our public libraries, as I have had pitched to me by the dedicated volunteers behind Meg's Toy Box in Hackett, is just one way we could do that. Early parenthood can be both isolating and expensive. Toy libraries offer a solution to both of these problems, yet they are not free to run and they certainly do not turn a profit, making public libraries a sensible potential home for them.

I am doubtful we would be making the tough decision of how to redistribute library opening hours in the first place if we had the foresight to more meaningfully resource, reimagine and reinvest in these vital community spaces to begin with. I understand the government has made arguments about the cost of maintaining current opening hours—I am sure we will hear more on that today—given the staffing changes that have been made, which I acknowledge. We should not dismiss that concern. But, given the level of community interest in this issue, it is right for this particular call not to be made by the government alone behind closed doors but transparently and by a majority of members of the Assembly. I acknowledge that some decisions are solely for the government, but I think, given the level of community interest in this particular issue, this should be a matter that the Assembly deliberates on.

Mr Braddock's amendment provides us with the information and time needed for that to happen. There is not an obvious social mandate, from what I can tell, for the government to make this change on its own, which is why I am supportive of a pause to the proposed changes until we have had an opportunity, as an Assembly, to properly consider and deliberate on what the government has announced.

On that, I thank Mr Braddock for incorporating a couple of my suggestions in his amendment, including to ensure that the findings of the strategic review into operating hours are provided to the Assembly, and not to implement a permanent or undefined pause with the proposed changes but to allow us to consider it as part of deliberations

on the appropriations bill and then make a change on the back of that. I thank Mr Braddock for his engagement on that.

I also again thank Mr Cain for bringing this important issue forward for our consideration today and signal that I will be supporting Ms Carrick's amendment, which is focused on issues that are very relevant to her electorate. I also thank the minister's office, which has been engaging with my office throughout the week on this. I again thank Mr Braddock and his office, Mr Cain and his office, and, most importantly, Carys Fisser from my office, who has been engaging very actively on this and helped with the preparation of this speech. It is her very last day in my office. She has been poached to work at the big house on the hill, which is such a loss to me and our team and also to the Assembly. I thank her for her work during her time in my office.

**MS LEE** (Kurrajong) (6.09): I thank Mr Cain for bringing this important motion to the Assembly today. Like many Canberrans, I was deeply concerned, though frankly not surprised, by this government's announcement late last week to reduce library opening hours. Since that announcement, there has been a great outpouring of disappointment from residents, including from my constituents in Kurrajong, where many locals have expressed concerns about the changes to Dickson and Kingston Libraries in particular. I share their concerns.

The decision to scale back access to Dickson Library is particularly troubling. This is not simply a matter of adjusting opening hours; it is a decision that undermines access to an essential community resource. Dickson Library is a heavily used and deeply valued facility, relied upon by a broad cross-section of our community. The removal of Sunday access and the broader reduction in hours will disproportionately impact those who depend on after-hours services, such as workers, students, families and others who cannot attend during standard weekday times.

Libraries are vital community hubs. They provide internet access, study spaces, programs and a safe, welcoming environment. For many older Canberrans, they are a place of connection and routine. For those without reliable internet at home, they are a gateway to essential services, and for vulnerable members of our community they offer something even more fundamental: a safe place to be. Yet the government seeks to justify these changes by pointing to so-called low demand for late night and Sunday hours. That argument simply does not withstand scrutiny. We heard this directly from the people who use Dickson Library, on ABC Radio in response to the announcement. One local texted in and said: "I'm very annoyed that Dickson Library is closing on Sundays. I dispute it was underutilised. I frequent this library on various days and at different times of the day and I have never, ever been the sole person in the library. Sundays were equally as busy when compared to any other day." We also heard from Raylene from Dickson, who called in to say, "It's an amazing library and there is always a crowd there. I have never been there when I have been on my own. It is just amazing, on weekends as well." Raylene went on to say, "On Sundays, it's equally as busy, so I really question where they are getting the figures to support the closure on Sundays."

Let me be frank: this decision is typical of this government. It is a decision made with no consultation and no genuine justification; a decision that reeks of disrespect to the community that the government serves; a decision announced by stealth on a Friday before a long weekend, hoping that it will go unnoticed by the community. Well, it has

been noticed, and the community is right to feel let down by this decision.

Libraries are not an optional extra; they are essential public infrastructure and they should be treated as such. Mr Cain's motion is both sensible and necessary. It reflects the concerns of the community and calls on the government to reconsider a decision that risks leaving many Canberrans worse off. I commend him for bringing this motion to the Assembly. I note that there is an amendment from Mr Braddock, and I understand that Mr Cain will be addressing that in his further remarks as well. Mr Emerson, lest I be left out, I thank Carys and I wish her all the very best. Thank you very much. Once again, I thank Mr Cain for bringing this motion to the Assembly.

**MS CARRICK** (Murrumbidgee) (6.13): Libraries are one of the few generally free and inclusive public spaces in Canberra. They provide far more than books, offering study areas, internet access, children's programs, community rooms and a safe place to go without needing to spend money. For many people they are essential. So, when opening hours or services change, access to that support changes too. I acknowledge the work of Libraries ACT staff and the operational pressures they face, but the community deserves clarity about what these changes mean in practice, because libraries should be judged not only by foot traffic but also by who relies on them and what they provide.

That is why I have brought forward an amendment with three parts. The first part asks the government to clearly identify which libraries will provide after-hours access for meetings. After-hours access matters. When I was involved with the Woden Valley Community Council, we highlighted the lack of after-hours access at Woden Library. The only alternative was relying on large clubs and their in-kind gambling community contributions—a clear gap in community infrastructure. We have had to ask everyone in the community to come to a big gaming club to attend our meetings. Woden Library has since improved, with meeting rooms and after-hours access. It really is terrific to be able to attend a community meeting in the evenings at the library and not have to go to the big clubs. That progress should be protected. If availability differs across libraries or changes, the Assembly and the community should know. That goes to the first part of my amendment: “identify which libraries will provide after-hours access”—and hopefully it will be Woden.

The second part of my amendment calls for an assessment of the impact of relocating Access Canberra into Woden Library. We got the meeting rooms just a few years ago. Recommendation 36 of the Libraries ACT Independent Working Group is: “Accelerating enhanced community connection with the co-location of libraries with Access Canberra Service Centres.” Co-location can make sense, but not at the expense of the library itself. The community deserves to understand what this would mean for floorspace, study areas, meeting rooms, seating, collections, programming, staff areas and opening hours. We also need assurance that we will not lose our meeting rooms and after-hours access so that community meetings can continue outside of the gaming clubs. Where was the consultation on any of this? Why was Woden chosen to co-locate with Access Canberra and other town centres were not? We would like the assessment of the impact on the library service at Woden. This is what the second part of my amendment calls for.

Accessibility is also critical. There is no dedicated parking at Woden Library and many residents already find it hard to reach the library due to its distance from the bus

interchange and the lack of bus services on the side of the town centre where the library is. On the west side, there are no bus services to get to the library. There is no parking to get to the library. People cannot get there. So, for a range of Canberrans, including older Canberrans, people with a disability and mothers with prams, there are practical access matters. Any proposal must show that services will not be diminished and that access will work in reality, not just on paper.

The third part of my amendment seeks an update on planning for the Molonglo Library. Molonglo is growing rapidly, yet residents are still waiting for core community infrastructure. The library there should not be an afterthought; it should be part of a planned community hub. If the government is reshaping the current network, it is reasonable to ask what the future network will look like. Libraries are essential social infrastructure. Before access changes, the community deserves clear, detailed answers. For these reasons, I commend my amendment to the Assembly.

I move the following amendment to Mr Braddock's amendment:

After paragraph (5)(f)(ii), insert:

- “(iii) identify which libraries will provide after-hours access;
- (iv) provide an assessment on the impact on services and amenities from relocating Access Canberra into the Woden library;
- (v) provide an update on planning for the Molonglo library and report back to the Assembly by the last week in September 2026;”.

**MR CAIN** (Ginninderra) (6.17): I was going to speak separately to the two amendments, but now I have grouped them together. That is fine too. I thank Mr Braddock for his amendment and for the discussions as well. Obviously, this is a place where we have discussions to see if we can get a net outcome that is overall an improvement. I know Mr Braddock's amendment calls for a pause and some scrutiny of the changes, meaning the net outcome under Mr Braddock's proposal would be that the current hours remain. I am very comfortable with that. That is really what I am looking for, of course. It gives the government an opportunity to really prove their case—if they want to try, that is. I and the Canberra Liberals will be supporting Mr Braddock's amendment

If anyone was ever in doubt about which electorate Ms Carrick represents, I think any doubt has been dispelled. I say that yet again. It is great to see a local member putting an argument forward, putting her foot forward, and putting in effort for her electorate, as we all should be doing. I commend Ms Carrick for that and have no dramas at all with the amendment that she proposed to Mr Braddock's amendment, which will obviously lead to an amended motion.

**MS CLAY** (Ginninderra) (6.19): On behalf of Kippax: not again! And to extend that to Erindale—seriously? A lot of people in the outer suburbs are worried about the level of service that they get, and they are right to be concerned. This announcement came out very quietly and not everyone has seen it yet. I have already been contacted by a lot of constituents who are quite worried about the idea of losing all weekend services at their branch in Kippax. I am certain the same is happening in Erindale. There is clearly

some room for change, but we would like to make sure that these changes are really carefully thought through and consulted on.

I am so grateful that this motion has been brought forward. I thank the opposition, Mr Braddock and Ms Carrick for making sure that we are actually sticking up for our library services. We all want a good operational system. We are pleased to modernise where we can, but removing the entirety of weekend services from some of our large districts is quite a big call. We have over 50,000 people in West Belconnen. Over 50,000 people are not happy about losing an entire third space on weekends.

**MS CARRICK** (Murrumbidgee) (6.13): Libraries are one of the few generally free, inclusive public spaces in Canberra. They provide far more than books, offering study areas, internet access, children's programs, community rooms and a safe place to go without needing to spend money. For many people, they are essential. So, when opening hours or services change, access to that support changes too. I acknowledge the work of Libraries ACT staff and the operational pressures they face, but the community deserves clarity about what these changes mean in practice because libraries should be judged not only by foot traffic but by who relies on them and what they provide.

That is why I have brought forward three amendments, moved as one. My first amendment asks the government to clearly identify which libraries will provide after-hours access for meetings. After-hours access matters. When I was involved with the Woden Valley Community Council, we highlighted the lack of after-hours access at the Woden library. The only alternative was relying on large clubs and their in-kind gambling community contributions; a clear gap in community infrastructure. We have had to ask everyone in the community to come to a big gaming club to attend our meetings. Woden library has since improved with meeting rooms and after-hours access. It really is terrific to be able to attend a community meeting in the evenings at the library and not have to go to the big clubs. That progress should be protected. If availability differs across libraries, or is changing, the Assembly and the community should know. So that is my first amendment: identify which libraries we will be providing after-hours access—and hopefully it will be Woden.

My second amendment calls for an assessment of the impact of relocating Access Canberra into Woden library. We just got the meeting rooms a few years ago. Recommendation 36 of the Libraries ACT independent working group is accelerating enhanced community connection with the co-location of libraries with Access Canberra service centres. Co-location can make sense, but not at the expense of the library itself. The community deserves to understand what this would mean for floor space, study areas, meeting rooms, seating, collections, programming, staff areas and opening hours. We also need assurance that we will not lose our meeting rooms and after-hours access so that community meetings can continue outside of the gaming clubs.

Where was the consultation on any of this?

Why was Woden chosen to co-locate with Access Canberra and other town centres were not?

We would like the assessment of the impact on the library service at Woden, and this is what my second amendment calls for.

Accessibility is also critical. There is no dedicated parking at the Woden library and many residents already find it hard to reach the library due to its distance from the bus interchange, and the lack of bus services on the side of the town centre where the library is located. On the west side, there are no bus services to get to the library. There is no parking to get to the library. People cannot get there. So, for a range of Canberrans—including older Canberrans, people with a disability, mothers with prams—there are practical access matters. Any proposal must show that services will not be diminished and that access will work in reality, not just on paper.

My third amendment seeks an update on planning for the Molonglo library. Molonglo is growing rapidly, yet residents are still waiting for core community infrastructure. The library there should not be an afterthought; it should be part of a planned community hub.

If the government is reshaping the current network, it is reasonable to ask what the future network will look like. Libraries are essential social infrastructure. Before access changes, the community deserves clear, detailed answers. For these reasons, I commend my amendments to the Assembly.

I move the following amendment to Mr Braddock's amendment:

After paragraph (5)(f)(ii), insert:

- (iii) identify which libraries will provide after-hours access;
- (iv) provide an assessment on the impact on services and amenities from relocating Access Canberra into the Woden library;
- (v) provide an update on planning for the Molonglo library and report back to the Assembly by the last week in September 2026;

**MR CAIN** (Ginninderra) (6.17): I was going to speak separately to the two amendments, but now I have grouped them together. Thank you, Mr Braddock, for your amendments and for the discussions. Obviously, this is a place where we have discussions to see if we can get a net outcome that is an overall improvement. I know Mr Braddock's amendments call for a pause and then some scrutiny of the changes, meaning the net outcome under Mr Braddock's proposal would be the current hours remain. I am very comfortable with that. That is really what I am looking for, of course. But I guess it gives the government an opportunity really prove their case—if they want to try, that is.

So, I will be supporting Mr Braddock's amendments. The Canberra Liberals will be supporting those and, I guess, if anyone was ever in doubt which electorate Ms Carrick was representing, I think that doubt has been dispelled, can I say, yet again. It is great to see a local member putting her foot forward and her effort forward for her electorate, as we all should be doing. So, I commend you, Ms Carrick, for that and have no dramas at all with the amendments that you propose to Mr Braddock's amendments, which will obviously lead to an amended motion.

**MS CLAY** (Ginninderra) (6.19): On behalf of Kippax: not again. And to extend that to Erindale, seriously? I think a lot of people in the outer suburbs are worried about the

level of service that they get—and they are right to be concerned. This announcement came out very quietly and I think not a lot of people have seen it yet. I have already been contacted by a lot of constituents who are quite worried about the idea of losing all weekend services in their branch at Kippax. I am certain the same is happening down in Erindale.

There is clearly some room for change, but we would like to make sure that these changes are really carefully thought through and consulted on.

I am so grateful that this motion has been brought up. I thank the opposition and Mr Braddock and Ms Carrick for making sure that we are actually sticking up for our library services. We all want a good operational system. We are pleased to modernise where we can, but removing the entirety of weekend services from some of our large districts is quite a big call. We have got over 50,000 people out in west Belconnen. Over 50,000 people are not that happy about losing an entire third space for the weekend.

**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) (6.21): I want to begin where this debate should have begun: with Libraries ACT staff. To the staff of Libraries ACT, I say publicly as I do privately: thank you. Thank you for the work that you do every day for our community. Thank you for continuing to serve Canberrans through periods of difficult change. Thank you for participating honestly and constructively in the independent working group process. In many ways, you had every reason to distrust that process. Thank you for speaking frankly about what has been working, what has not been working and what has been unsustainable for too long.

And thank you for doing what, frankly, too many people in this place have failed to do today: engaging seriously with the realities of the service, the realities of your workforce and the need for sustainable reform.

I want to be clear to you, as I was when I released the independent working group report to you—through you, Mr Speaker—that, just as we said then, the development of the responses to the recommendations in that report would be done with you, not to you. And nothing about what is in the calls-on, in any part of the amended motion today, changes that.

The motion does not change our commitment to you, to the reform process or to our implementing the working group's recommendations in a responsible and considered way. I will not be allowing a political motion in this place to be used to create any anxiety for staff; to undermine the work that staff have done in good faith; or to suggest that the careful work of the independent working group can simply be swept aside when it becomes politically inconvenient.

The context that the original motion ignored is that before this reform work began, Libraries ACT was experiencing regular service disruption. Branches were facing unplanned closures. Canberrans were turning up to libraries only to find that services were unexpectedly unavailable. Staff were being asked to operate within a system that was under pressure, difficult to roster, difficult to manage and not always fair. 195 unplanned branch closures occurred over three financial years. In 2024-25 alone,

there were 94 branch closures.

An independent working group was established. It was not a desktop exercise, not a token consultation, not a device to delay action. It was established because there were real and persistent problems in Libraries ACT that needed to be understood properly. That working group visited every library branch. It met with the corporate library teams. It held 27 face-to-face question-and-answer discussions. Staff were invited to provide anonymous questions and feedback. There were 38 individual email submissions. There were 81 survey responses. Union representatives offered opportunities to provide feedback, and they were present at the majority of staff sessions.

The recommendations the working group came back with were directed to the root causes of library closures: staff wellbeing concerns, workforce instability, budget pressures, rostering problems, communication failures, systems issues, technology gaps, unclear strategic direction and the long-term sustainability of the service. The report did not simply say, “Add staff and everything is fixed.” It did not say, “preserve every opening hour and ignore the model.” It did not say to continue the same rostering arrangements indefinitely.

Instead, it found the historical and current service delivery model, including the location of branches, operating hours and services delivered—

Mr Speaker, this is disruptive.

**MR SPEAKER:** Members, if you want to have a discussion, if I could ask you to go to the anteroom? Thank you, minister. Continue.

**MS CHEYNE:** I hope that this motion and this speech are being treated with the respect that these staff deserve.

The report found that the historical and current service delivery model—including the location of branches, operating hours and services delivered—has evolved over a long period without significant review. It identified a potential inconsistency in the level of service across locations and suburbs. It examined catchments, population projections and overlapping service areas and it found the model was no longer adequate to meet the operational demands of library services, or accommodate the diverse working arrangements of staff. It identified inequities between roster patterns. It identified complexity and inconsistency, and it identified rigid arrangements that reduce flexibility for staff and management.

It recommended a complete review of staffing and rostering. It recommended new sequential rostering principles and resetting expectations around staffing frameworks. It recommended clearer processes, better leave management, mobility across branches, consistent standard operating procedures, and better use of enabling staff where appropriate. These are not minor administrative matters, Mr Speaker.

Rostering is the architecture of the service, as it is for any frontline service. If the roster is unfair, staff feel it. If leave cannot be approved, staff feel it. If casuals are used to fill ongoing gaps rather than genuinely ad-hoc needs, staff feel it. If branches rely on fragile last-minute workarounds, staff feel it. And when staff feel it, the community will

eventually feel it too, through the closures, disruption, the reduced reliability and the reduced confidence in the service.

The report is very clear that the issues in Libraries ACT are interconnected. It identifies staffing pressures, but it also identifies cultural issues, breakdowns in trust and communication, inefficient and inflexible rostering, problems with leave approval processes, unclear role expectations, outdated technology, immature systems and processes, and a service delivery model that has evolved over time without sufficient review.

Perhaps most significant—and what I still find chilling to read—is the significant erosion of trust within the organisation. It identified concerns about communication, transparency and inclusive decision-making. It identified a divide between branch staff and enabling, or the leadership teams. It identified staff feeling unsupported, reactive and disconnected from a shared strategic vision.

That is exactly why the government has treated the recommendations as a package; not cherry-picking the easy ones, not ignoring the difficult ones, not approaching it incrementally. The report itself warns against that approach. It says incremental improvements will not be sufficient. It called for rebuilding trust, reforming operational processes, improving communication and fostering a culture of mutual respect and shared responsibility. I committed to staff that the work to develop an approach to the recommendations would be done with them, not to them—and that is exactly the work that this motion and the amendments risk undermining.

Members in this place say they value staff and they respect consultation. They say they want decisions to be evidence based, they want the services to be sustainable, they want the government to listen. But when staff are actually listened to, when a genuine independent process has been established, staff views were actively sought, the union participated, the evidence was considered and recommendations were made, and when the government accepted those recommendations and began to implement them with staff, then members have come into this chamber and tried to unpick that outcome because there are some hard decisions in one of those recommendations.

What that does, Mr Speaker, is tell staff that the consultation they participated in can be second guessed in the Assembly; that the reform process that they engaged in can be overturned on the floor of the Assembly because it suits the politics of the day. It tells staff that recommendations can be accepted in principle but abandoned when the politics become uncomfortable. It tells staff that the Assembly knows better than the people who worked through the detail.

*At 6.30 pm, in accordance with standing order 34, the debate was interrupted. The motion for the adjournment of the Assembly having been put and negatived, the debate was resumed.*

**MS CHEYNE:** So, I will not stand here and say that we respect staff and then vote for a motion that disrespects the process that staff contributed to.

There is another lesson in the report that members should not ignore. The working group looked at 14 previous external reviews undertaken into Libraries ACT since

2006—14— and identified a critical gap. In nearly all instances there was no evidence of implementation of previous recommendations or structured delivery programs assigning responsibilities or timelines. That should make every member in this place pause.

The worst thing that we could do in this place—something that I promised staff I would not do—is to review, report, delay, drift, disrupt. Even the amendments—and I appreciate how well intentioned they are—are about delay, disrupt, review, report, probably drift. We cannot do that, Mr Speaker. If the Assembly causes any sort of pause, it is saying to staff, “We do not trust your operational decisions.”

So, I thank the Chief Minister for his wise counsel. And we are not still going to be here at 3.00 am. We will let the motions and the amendments pass. I appreciate, Ms Carrick, you clarifying what you meant by 5(f)(v), because after-hours access “full stop” versus after-hours access to meeting rooms is different. But you have said meeting rooms, that is helpful. Because I was going to say, we are not doing it. But we will do that. So, yours are fine.

I need to be clear, Mr Speaker, I cannot do 5(c) or 5(e) in Mr Braddock’s amendments. I am not going to vote against them but I have to be clear; this is an operational reality. I cannot do 5(c) and I cannot do 5(e). I can try and do 5(c) as best as we possibly can—I will try—but I cannot do 5(e).

I am confused about 5(g) but I will work with Mr Braddock to try to understand exactly what outcome he is seeking, and I will do my best to at least meet the intent of that.

I think, perhaps, the best way that I can end this, Mr Speaker, is by noting that since the work of the independent working group concluded, there has not been a single unplanned closure. That is a significant achievement. It is an achievement for staff, for management, for the service and for the community. That is because all of the other recommendations have been implemented with staff.

The motion asks us to undermine a reform program that has already delivered greater service stability; to ignore the very report that members in this place called for. I do appreciate just how well-intentioned people are. And if people think that there is any joy in these sorts of decisions: no. But 11.5 hours, from 411.5 hours, Mr Speaker, that is not significant. It is less than three per cent.

**Mr Cain:** Then it is not a redistribution, it is a reduction.

**MS CHEYNE:** Mr Cain said it was significant, but I guess that is what you get from someone with class honours in their maths degree. I will leave it there, Mr Speaker.

**Mr Cain:** Shame on you.

**MR SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr Cain. I will make the point that we need to have debate finished tonight by seven; there is no provision for a dinner break—the staff have not been advised. I just make that comment before we continue.

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

Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (6.35): I was not intending to speak, Mr Speaker, but I will speak very briefly. I would just point out that we had a long debate, prior to the budget-reply speeches, about respect for staff and that all workers, in all workplaces, deserve respect and safety.

I am not convinced that this motion—as I think Ms Cheyne has repeatedly said, while well intentioned—and this end result will respect staff. This end result, if it requires staff to start working Sunday shifts again and to start working after-hours shifts again, when they have been through a detailed consultation process and they have co-designed an outcome that reflects the way that community currently uses libraries, is not safe. It is not respectful of our public servants. And I one hundred per cent support Ms Cheyne in standing up for what they have co-designed through the independent working group.

**MS TOUGH** (Brindabella) (6.36): I promise everyone in the chamber that I will keep it really short. I just want to echo the words of Minister Cheyne, and Minister Stephen-Smith. I put on the record that I am the daughter of a librarian, and I have grown up in libraries. They are my second home. I have been in public libraries; I have been in retirement village libraries and hospital libraries. They are where my mum worked. They are where I would spend my school holidays. After school I would catch the bus there. I would spend my sick days there. I spent many a day on crutches hobbling around public libraries instead of going to school.

Libraries are fundamental to me. I was working out with my office that I think I have borrowed close to 20 books from ACT Libraries to read this year alone. I have read over 25 books this year. It is what keeps me sane in this place. So when things have been happening in the last few years with libraries, I have taken a keen interest in what we can do to help our libraries and our librarians to make them great places, because, also, as a mum, I have spent many a time in a Giggle and Wiggle and a Story Time. It is a place you take your child—I think Mr Emerson was saying this earlier—when you are not really sure where to take them, but you know it is a great place to go with a kid, and there are other kids around. And libraries are not the libraries of my childhood, where you had to be quiet; they are fun, great places. And to be fair, my mum was also a children’s librarian for a while—so there is that love of things to do with kids in libraries.

When the review was announced last year, I was really excited about what this could bring—ensuring the librarians actually had a voice at the table. When my mum was working in a local council library, there were often people in the council who would say, “Let’s cut libraries because they’re not important.” So hearing that the government was going to work with librarians and library staff through this process—and to know that there have not been unplanned closures since this happened.

I will put on the record that when the report did come out last year, one of my concerns was what the future of Erindale Library would look like—with Civic and the lowest patronage libraries. What I did was engage straight with the minister and her office. Her office can tell you how much I have annoyed them about Erindale Library over the past few months, because it is such an important place, with its Giggle and Wiggle and its Story Time and its free parking. This is why the outcome, having worked with the staff and with the librarians, is that Erindale Library will be open weekdays and it is actually going to open an hour earlier.

I know many people have commented on the negative feedback they have received, but I have actually received some really positive feedback from the change in library hours, because they are going to open at 9 am. And I know librarians might be annoyed because that is the shelving hour, and my mum is going to hate this when she finds out, because when she lost her shelving hour that was always a pain. But families will be able to drop their older kid at school and take a kid straight to the library for something to do—and when your kid wakes up way too early in the morning and you are just desperate to get out of the house for somewhere to take them, having a library there, open earlier at 9 am.

Mr Werner-Gibbings and I do a mobile office at Tuggeranong Library, in the community space, once a month starting at 10 am when the library opens. We usually get there at about 10 to-ish, and there are queues at Tuggeranong Library, on a Friday morning before 10 am—of people wanting to get in the door. So opening them earlier when people want to use them is really a positive.

I will end there because I am looking at the time. I just want to thank Minister Cheyne for all the work she has done with libraries, thank her office for all the work they have done with libraries, thank the librarians and all the library staff for the work they do for our community and thank the independent working group.

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

**Mr Braddock's** amendment, as amended, agreed to.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

## **Statements by members**

### **Sport and recreation—sportsgrounds roundtable**

**MR MILLIGAN** (Yerrabi) (6.41): I want to take this opportunity just to talk briefly about the sportsground round table that we had on 4 June at the Southern Cross Club. Mr Parton and I attended that and held that round table, and of course we had a few other members who attended the evening as well. We had Ms Barry, Mr Cain, Mr Cocks, Ms Carrick, and also the minister attended.

This round table was about hearing directly from the sporting community in terms of the issues that they are facing. From the round table we had a motion yesterday, which called on the government to restore some of these dryland ovals to help ease the pressure on our sportsgrounds here and to help support the sporting community, and that was successful. It was good to see that the minister has announced plans, just recently, to start consultation with the community on five of those dryland ovals, so that was a great outcome for the community.

As promised to the attendees but also mentioned during the motion yesterday, we will be tabling a listening report from the round table that we held just last week. Hopefully we see good outcomes for the community.

I seek leave to table the document.

Leave granted.

**MR MILLIGAN:** I table:

Listening report into the Canberra Liberals Sportsground Roundtable—Report 1, prepared by James Milligan MLA, dated June 2026

### **Nepalese community—Mount Everest Day**

**MR BRADDOCK** (Yerrabi) (6.42): I just wanted to recognise that it was International Everest Day last week. This was an opportunity for the Canberra Nepalese community to come together to celebrate the wonderful achievement of the first climb of Mount Everest by Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay, and to recognise the vulnerable environment that constitutes Mount Everest. Climate change is having a significant impact in terms of the glaciers and the ability to climb the mountain. This is combined with the fact that the amount of rubbish that has been left there by numerous climbers over generations has had a detrimental impact on the mountain.

It was a great opportunity to come together at Yerrabi Pond District Park and celebrate with the Nepalese community and to also enjoy some food with them. It was an opportunity to really enjoy what it means to be a community member in the variety of different cultures that make up our Canberra community.

### **Clerk of the Assembly—Mr Tom Duncan**

**MR WERNER-GIBBINGS** (Brindabella) (6.43): I am just going to quickly add my voice to the adulation, support and words of gratitude to the Clerk on this his last sitting day, and add my own personal reflection. I have not known him very long, but I know him well enough to be fairly certain that, had he been a constituent of Tuggeranong, he would have given me his No 1 preference! The revelation then occurred to me after another very successful engagement with him earlier this week—as I was patting myself on the back—that we probably all have had that perception.

Mr Speaker, you mentioned the Clerk's impartiality. I think he has taken it further: his standard is perceived partiality! I would presume there is not one of the 96 members of this place who you mentioned before who would not have thought that, had he been a constituent or if he is a constituent—talking to them the way he talks to you or me or anyone here—that he had their back and would be voting for them.

I do not know how he does it. That is some kind of Assembly sorcery, Mr Speaker! It is an extraordinary ability to make everyone feel so supported in a job; for him that must be extremely difficult. I thank him very much. I am looking forward to him coming down to Tuggeranong and doing what he said I think you should be doing.

### **Radford College—community art show**

**MR CAIN** (Ginninderra) (6.45): There are a couple of cultural expressions—I will put it that way and then you will get my meaning—that do so much for bringing people together, in different ways of course. Sport is one of them. I mean, people who do not

get along with each other politically, or are from different professions and different locations, have got the same love of a game. They are together. They love seeing the spectacle.

The other one that really stands out for me is like cultural glue—there you go, I have just found it, Mr Speaker: “cultural glue”. Cultural glue is the arts. The arts are obviously a very strong and prominent part of our school curriculum, as they should be, and, frankly, I would love to see that happen more strongly across the board.

I mention, as an example, that one of my recent excursions was to the art show at Radford College late in May. Obviously, it is one of the biggest independent schools in the electorate of Ginninderra, and they had a gala opening on Friday the 29th. What was lovely to see was that it was a display of student art—as you would expect at a school art show—but also incorporated in the display were local artists. So it was a great way to bring the works of local, adult artists to the fore alongside student artworks. They had a couple of professional judges through the event, and it was just a delight to see art being celebrated.

I thank Sarah Clough, the president of the Parent & Friends, and Christopher Bradbury, the principal, for creating this opportunity.

*Discussion concluded.*

## **Adjournment**

Motion (by **Ms Stephen-Smith**) proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

## **Service veterans—commemoration**

**MR CAIN** (Ginninderra) (6.47): And there is time, Mr Speaker! No-one needs to stay. You can all go early if you want to.

My adjournment is about one of my portfolios. I have not had a portfolio I did not like, but being shadow minister for veterans touches something special in me—and I think it would touch something special in anyone who had the responsibility, whether as the minister or as shadow minister, as in my case.

My stepfather was a sailor on the HMAS *Australia* during World War II—through a kamikaze attack. My goodness! He was blown down the deck. I use that as a particular example to say that to be in the company of people who serve in our forces, and who have served, is a great privilege and honour of mine. Mr Speaker, I acknowledge your own service and thank you for it.

Over the last month and a bit, Anzac Day was obviously a very significant, prominent event. It was a great delight to spend the morning with my wife. And I will say: we are not usually out together at 4.30 am in the morning, but we were then. I was very worried about parking near the memorial for the dawn service, and I was so cautious, we got there so early. We had the privilege of being there from 4.30 am to hear really very

moving readings from diaries and letters from frontline soldiers—very, very touching. I am sure they are available if people want to get in touch with those experiences—firsthand accounts of those.

Then, of course, there was the wonderful dawn service, and my wife and I then shared breakfast in the relatively new Anzac Atrium, with the wonderful “G for George” and so many other massive military pieces of equipment. It is really a spectacle. I endorse it, of course.

Then we were both able to attend the National Commemorative Service, which included the RSL ACT Branch’s Veterans’ March. I attended the last post at the end of the day, on my own in that case.

Prior to Anzac Day, it was a delight to join the War Widows ACT community for their 31st Field of Remembrance Dedication Day at the RSL LifeCare El Alamein. I believe I was in company with Ms Tough, and we laid a wreath together. I have talked about “cultural glue” in my 90-second statement. I think things like acknowledging the service of our veterans and our armed forces is something that really should cross political divides, and I was grateful for the opportunity to do that with Ms Tough.

The day before Anzac Day it was a delight to join the Woden RSL. From 1993 they have had local schools gathering for wreath-laying, for commemorative essay readings, and for, obviously, very on-theme speeches and representations from our veterans and our armed forces in attendance. It was a very great honour to be there as shadow minister for veterans to lay a wreath and to see the schoolchildren also being presented with the importance of service that puts people at the front edge of risk but for the great cause of national interest and preserving our freedom and liberty.

And then recently it was the 84th anniversary of the Battle of the Coral Sea, a naval turning point in World War II. And it is very touching that I have been to a couple of events with the Japanese Ambassador, His Excellency Kazuhiro Suzuki: the commemoration of the Battle of Coral Sea, which was a turning point where the Japanese navy suffered a significant loss as they were heading towards our continent; and at the Sandakan Remembrance Day, which was the single biggest atrocity against Australian troops in any war—a death march of Australian and British prisoners through the jungles of South-East Asia, towards the end of World War II.

I really want to commend the Japanese ambassador for his grace and acceptance, and for being a representative of his people—the new Japan, so to speak. It was a great delight. I am really honoured to have this role, and I hope to continue with it.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

**The Assembly adjourned at 6.52 pm until Tuesday, 15 September at 10 am**