



DEBATES
OF THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

DAILY HANSARD

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16 September 2026

This is an **EDITED PROOF TRANSCRIPT** of proceedings that is subject to further checking. Members' suggested corrections for the official *Weekly Hansard* are requested to be lodged in writing with the Hansard office no later than **Wednesday, 7 October 2026**.

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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.

Attorney-General
Motion of censure

MR PARTON (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (10.01), by leave: I move:

That this Assembly:

- (1) notes that on 18 June this year, the Assembly passed a motion calling for the Government to pause the Sunday library closures;
- (2) further notes despite the Assembly motion, the Sunday library closures proceeded earlier this year;
- (3) further notes that in May of 2025, Minister Cheyne introduced legislation to enable seatbelt infringements detected by cameras;
- (4) further notes that since enforcement began in November of 2025 the government issued 12,850 infringements before discovering in August of this year that the cameras had not been properly authorised for seatbelt enforcement;
- (5) recognises the role that the Assembly plays in holding the Government to account, particularly in the context the Westminster conventions on ministerial accountability in our system of responsible government;
- (6) notes the importance of Ministers ensuring senior leaders of the ACT Public Service are held accountable; and
- (7) censures Minister Tara Cheyne for proceeding with ACT Library closures in contempt of the clear Assembly Motion and failures in the traffic infringement area of her portfolio responsibilities.

Labor governs the territory in a minority parliament and we understand that that is sometimes not easy, but it also means that, if the government or a government minister does things or fails to do things that the non-government members feel is unacceptable, we have the power to send a strong message to that minister and to the government, and, indeed, to send a strong message to the residents of this city that we strongly disapprove of what has been done—and disapprove we do.

This chamber passed a motion earlier this year calling on the minister to pause the weekend closure of libraries. The motion was quite clear and in absolute contempt of the parliament. The public backlash that has occurred as a consequence of the minister not following through on what was agreed to is indicative that the vast majority of Canberrans are absolutely with us on this matter. If the chamber passes this censure motion today, it will be, in part, about the frustration of coming here to debate a matter, arriving at a clear conclusion, but then being ignored by the relevant minister. It cannot continue.

We are about to, after this debate, note a lodged petition into this matter, and it is quite clear that a large number of constituents are in total agreement with this motion of censure on the basis of that matter. It appears that they are also with us on the second matter: the absolute mismanagement of the seatbelt infringements. In our view, you cannot, in the first instance, send out thousands upon thousands of fines for matters that are essentially not legal and then force to change it through legislation without any genuine scrutiny.

We must, as a parliament—certainly the opposition and the crossbench—recognise the role that we play in holding the government to account, particularly in the context of the Westminster conventions on ministerial accountability in our system of responsible government, and we must always understand the importance of ministers ensuring that senior leaders of the ACT public service are held accountable. In our view, the minister has failed on these two fronts and must be held accountable. I therefore commend this motion of censure to the chamber.

MR BRADDOCK(Yerrabi) (10.04): I rise in support of this motion, because at its heart this debate is about more than just library open hours; it is about how we value public services, how we listen to our communities, and how we hold ministers to account when they disregard the clear intent of the Assembly.

Libraries are a central public infrastructure and the cornerstone of our community. They are places of learning, connection and refuge, and they provide access to literary services, digital resources, study spaces and community programs. They offer a safe, welcoming environment for people of all ages and backgrounds and increasingly serve as critical third spaces outside of home and work. At a time of rising cost-of-living pressures, growing social isolation and increasing housing insecurity, spaces such as these matter more than ever. This is why the community response to cutting opening hours has been so significant.

Later today, I will take great delight in tabling a petition signed by 3,557 Canberrans online and a further 104 hardcopy signatures. They have signed this petition calling on the ACT government to invest in the ACT library service and opposing the recent reduction to library opening hours. Community members have organised, advocated and made it abundantly clear they completely reject these changes. The groundswell of opposition and strength of that feeling has been remarkable.

I also want to acknowledge the work of Libraries ACT staff and the members of the independent working group over the last few months on improving the library service. The ACT Greens have heard countless stories from members of the community who

deeply value their local library and the staff who make these spaces so welcoming and vibrant. On the final weekend before the cuts were rolled out, the community banded together and collectively wrote thank you notes to our ACT librarians. That outpouring of appreciation speaks volumes about the fundamental role libraries play in people's everyday lives.

The community's message has been clear: they do not stand with the government in this decision. But, in blatant disregard of community feedback, the government has justified steamrolling ahead with this reduction in opening hours on the basis that they supposedly "enhance service delivery, better align opening hours with usage patterns and reflect recommendations from the independent working group". As I articulated in my response to Mr Cain's motion earlier this year, the government's explanation is not only lacklustre but also raises more questions than it answers. The independent working group identified workforce pressures, understaffing and workplace cultural issues as key challenges facing a library's service, yet, instead of addressing these issues for greater investment, the government has chosen to reduce community access to its libraries. At its core, the government has presented the Assembly with a false choice: either maintain the library network footprint or maintain existing opening hours. We reject that false binary.

Canberra deserves a library system that is both accessible and adequately staffed—one that supports its workforce while continuing to meet the needs of a diverse and growing community. Do not position the needs of the community and ACT librarians as antithetical when the answer to workforce pressures is genuine financial investment rather than reduced access. The IWG's report says the problem is understaffing and poor culture, not weekend opening hours. The government picked the cheapest fix, not the one that the librarians were actually asking for.

We must be careful in adopting an overly simplistic, demand-led approach to public services. The government points to lower weekend visitation rates as justification for reducing weekend access, but the lower usage alone does not explain the extent to which a service is valued or needed. We know that programming drives participation, we know that consistent opening hours help communities build habits of use, and we know that, when services are reduced, attendance can decline further. There is a real risk of creating a cycle where the lower usage is used to justify reduced hours, which then leads to even lower usage and further reductions in service. This is not strategic planning; it is managed decline.

There has been very little publicly available to indicate the government has adequately explored the alternative approaches articulated in the motion that passed this place. Where is the analysis of expanded programming to increase weekend participation? Where is the benchmarking against other jurisdictions that continue to provide broader access? Where is the consideration of libraries as part of a wider ecosystem of community infrastructure and third spaces? And where is the assessment of the impacts on vulnerable Canberrans, who rely most heavily on these services? Those questions remain largely unanswered in yesterday's government response.

The recent reduction in library opening hours also highlights a broader equity issue in the territory. Under these changes, the Sunday library access has disappeared entirely from the nation's capital, and Kippax, Erindale and Civic have completely lost weekend

access. For working families, shift workers and children who rely on nearby programs such as Giggle and Wiggle, weekend access is often the only time that fits around work, school and caring responsibilities. For many people in outer suburban communities such as Kippax and Erindale, access to public spaces is already limited and weekend public transport services can be infrequent, making travel to other library branches difficult. When access is reduced to these communities, the impact is not felt equally; it falls most heavily on those with the fewest alternatives and disproportionately impacts those who may rely on our libraries the most.

We should be honest about how we arrived at this point. Repeated unplanned closures occurred because the government failed to adequately invest in the workforce needed to maintain reliable service delivery. Now, instead of addressing that problem at its root, we are seeing a reduction in frontline service delivery. That is the choice that is being presented. It may be presented as a reform for the greater good, but thousands within the community see it for what it is: a scaling-back of services to fit within fiscal constraints.

That brings me to today. Earlier this year, in June, the Assembly passed a motion moved by Mr Cain expressing concern about the proposed changes to library opening hours and calling on the government to provide further information and transparency around its decision-making. That motion reflected genuine community concern and sought to ensure that any changes to library services acted genuinely in the best interests of both the community and the staff, and that those decisions were subject to appropriate scrutiny by this very Assembly. Instead, the government proceeded with the cuts before the passage of the appropriations bill and before the Assembly had the opportunity to fully consider the broader budget context and alternatives available. This is despite the aforementioned motion explicitly calling for pause of the implementation of any proposed changes to hours until passage of that bill.

There is an increasingly concerning pattern of Assembly resolutions being treated as optional rather than authoritative expressions of the will of the parliament. When motions are passed by the Assembly, ministers have an obligation to take them seriously. When petitions garner above 3,500 signatures, ministers should also take note of where the community sentiment is. The principle of responsible government depends on ministerial accountability to parliament, and, under our Westminster system, ministers are accountable not only for the decisions they make but also for the way they respond to the decisions of the Assembly. This situation warrants accountability and it cannot go without response from the Assembly. So, while broader budgetary caucus decisions undoubtedly contributed to the lack of investment in Libraries ACT, ministerial accountability ultimately implicates Minister Cheyne.

The ACT Greens stand in support of this motion for the reasons that I have just mentioned around libraries. The censure is not simply about library hours; it is about accountability, it is about respecting the role of the Assembly, and it is about standing with a community that has made its views abundantly and passionately clear. The government had a choice: it could have invested in the workforce, explored alternatives and engaged more openly with the concerns raised by the community and by this Assembly; instead, it chose to reduce access and press ahead, blatantly disregarding June's motion.

I will talk very briefly to the amendments which have been circulated in my name. I spoke on this yesterday. Whilst I share the frustration and the disappointment that we are where we are with the seatbelts, I am of the view that we have to pass the validation bill. I am of the view that it was the directorate's mistake, in failing to update their instrument; hence, I have circulated amendments to remove the seatbelt elements from this particular motion. I implore everyone to consider that, yes, the seatbelts are a concern, but the issue is not sufficient to put in a censure motion.

I seek leave to move the amendments circulated in my name together.

Leave granted.

MR BRADDOCK: I move:

1. Omit paragraphs (3) and (4).
2. In paragraph (7), omit all words after "Assembly Motion".

MS CHEYNE(Ginninderra—Manager of Government Business, Attorney-General, Minister for City and Government Services, and Minister for Transport) (10.14): I approach this debate respectfully. A censure is the heaviest thing that this Assembly can say about one of its members, short of removing them, and I would hope the accompanying motion would then be accurate and precise. It is regrettable that the motion brought forward by the Leader of the Opposition is neither. What does that say for respect for this place? The motion says that the libraries resolution passed on 18 June. I do not know about you, Mr Speaker, but we were not here then. It passed on 12 June. It describes that resolution as a call to pause Sunday library closures. Ultimately, what was passed was a broader resolution about the implementation of changed hours.

I need to be clear that the changes to library hours was not a question of whether libraries would be open. All libraries in the ACT remain open. The question became not whether they would be open but when they would be open. Indeed, one of the branches that lost its Saturday is in my electorate. One of the branches that lost its Sunday is in my electorate. As I said yesterday, I did not exempt it. It would have been politically easier, of course, for me to do so, but a reform that spares the minister's seat is not a reform. A reform that needs to be system-wide must be system-wide. I cannot ask other communities to accept change and to spare my own.

I made that decision. I explained it. I own it. It is complex, but it is not the binary, simplistic version that Mr Braddock has put today. I am concerned about his comment that there is a pattern of treating motions in this place as optional. That is disrespectful, I believe, to the public service and to my colleagues, who, I have to say, bend over backwards both in negotiations when trying to be clear about what is genuinely achievable and in the spirit of coming together. But also, when something is put, we do our very best to meet it, sometimes with honestly ridiculous asks or timelines.

What most concerns me from what Mr Parton and Mr Braddock have said so far is that I was clear. And no-one has said this yet, but I was clear in that debate on 12 June, not 18 June, about what I could and could not do. I will quote myself. I said:

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).

Now, 5(c), for those who do not have that amended motion in front of them, was about ensuring that we had lockers available as soon as possible and ideally before any library-hour changes occurred. We were not able to do that, but we are making our very best efforts to get those open ASAP, and they will be open before the end of the year. And 5(e) was to pause the change in library hours until the Assembly came back to this place. I am not sure how much clearer I could have been. I was candid. I did not hide it. I made it clear—and I made it clear throughout that day with Mr Parton, with Mr Cain and with Mr Braddock—as we sought to negotiate, that I would not be able to do it, and they have all omitted that fact today.

The motion and media release from the Canberra Liberals describes this as contempt. I am particularly concerned that the party which seeks to lead this territory, and particularly the former Speaker, is wilfully ignorant of decades of established precedent. "Contempt" has an express definition in our standing orders, as you would know, Mr Speaker, and it has been expressly defined in the *Companion to the Standing Orders* since advice was issued by the Clerk to, I think, Speaker Berry almost 30 years ago. How the executive responds to a resolution of the Assembly cannot be regarded as contempt. So, for the former Speaker to issue a media release saying it is contempt and for the motion to include words that it is contempt of this place when I was candid in our negotiations—candid in this place, on the record, in the *Hansard*—what precedent are we setting for the next 30 years? It is quite extraordinary.

The motion also ignores the government response tabled yesterday. Mr Braddock's comments did not mention it at all. The government response is lengthy and it is comprehensive. I should perhaps not be surprised that there has been such ignorance of it even existing, let alone the detail that is in it that perhaps would have improved Mr Braddock's comments in his speech. But I should not be surprised, because, if anyone looks at what happened yesterday when I spoke to that response, members, including Mr Cain, were chatting amongst themselves, so how seriously is anyone really taking the substance of this?

What I can confirm today—and I am trying to circulate amendments to amendments; we will see how we go—is that we do commit to expanding community access to ACT libraries. That will include prioritising weekend branch access at Kippax and Erindale from July 2027. It needs to remain open to government as to what that looks like. That goes to the heart of all this. This is about operational realities, but we can commit to prioritising weekend branch access at Kippax and Erindale from July 2027.

We will also commit to continuing to improve and modernise our library services across Canberra through service delivery models that enhance accessibility, responsiveness and value for the community. We will publish an evaluation of library operating arrangements by March 2027 to guide future improvements. And, for all the members who pretend to care but have not read the government response, criteria are set out in that government response as to what that assessment will look like. It is not just

visitation.

Now to seatbelt cameras. Yes, I introduced the law, but the legislature decides whether a law is passed. It was passed unanimously on 3 September. It is legislative intent that the opposition put their name to. Now they have a problem with it. The thing is that the offence has always been law and the cameras worked. Every notice is checked by a person. Twenty of those notices have been tested in court and every single one has been upheld. The defect that we are talking about here is words in an instrument approving the cameras for that use. Access Canberra found the omission. When the error was found, the notices were paused that week, the instrument was fixed within days, and legislation was introduced yesterday to put the issue beyond doubt. I did not learn of this from the opposition. I, through my office, told the opposition. It is not concealment; it is an error owned and repaired. The party that openly wants to put that repair at risk is the Canberra Liberals.

This motion asks the Assembly to censure me for two things: a decision I candidly explained before the Assembly voted, including what I could not do, and an administrative error that was found, stopped and corrected. Accountability cannot mean pretending that administration never fails. I also note the point about holding senior public servants to account. Senior public servants have stepped up on both of these issues time and time again. They have fronted up; I have fronted up. There is no hiding and there is no defying. It is a case of: “We will explain this.” Yes, this is tough, but we will stand by it. In both cases, it is about fixing issues. Accountability cannot mean pretending that administration never fails. It must mean that, when it fails, government finds it, it says so, it stops it and it fixes it.

The question that this motion puts is not whether administration matters; the question and the stakes, I suppose, for this Assembly relate to the threshold. If the threshold is that a minister who tells the Assembly about operational constraints—before a vote; published in *Hansard*; and dealt with, or attempted to be dealt with, through negotiations—may be censured when those constraints prove real, and, if a minister who acknowledges and corrects an error—and a huge shout-out to my chief of staff, who is the best on the planet and went out of his way to brief all members in this place while I was on leave—may be censured because an error simply occurred, then that lesson for every future minister, including those opposite who desire to be one, is dangerous.

I do not and I will not accept that candour is misconduct and I certainly will not accept that it is contempt. I greatly appreciate Mr Emerson’s amendment regarding “admonishes” rather than “censures”, because it is about the threshold. The Assembly absolutely can and should, if that is its will, disagree. “Admonishes” is fair enough. But I certainly cannot accept—through this motion and, indeed, through how members, whom I expected better of, have behaved—that this Assembly can make itself stronger or that accountability is strengthened by making honesty about failure something ministers learn to fear.

I move:

Add:

“(8) notes that the ACT Government has committed to expanding community

access to ACT libraries, including prioritising weekend branch access at Kippax and Erindale from July 2027; continuing to improve and modernise library services across Canberra through service delivery models that enhance accessibility, responsiveness and value for the community; and publishing an evaluation of library operating arrangements by March 2027 to guide future improvements.”.

Ms Cheyne’s amendment to Mr Braddock’s amendment agreed to.

MR SPEAKER: The question now is that Mr Braddock’s amendments, as amended, be agreed to.

MR CAIN(Ginninderra) (10.30): I thank the Leader of the Canberra Liberals for bringing this censure motion. I think it is important for the community to hear that the Canberra Liberals will call out a failed behaviour by a minister of this government. As has been touched on by many, there was a motion supported by the majority of members in this Assembly in June this year that asked the government to pause the weekend closure of libraries. Subject to Greens amendments, my original motion asked for the government to pause the weekend closures. Minister Cheyne proceeded, nonetheless. She said, in her own statement, that, when the government get a motion supported by this Assembly, they do the best they can. Yet, as she was walking out of this chamber at the conclusion of the debate, she said, “Well, I can’t do those.” That is not an indication of considering a motion supported by the Assembly, in my opinion. So Mr Parton has, I think rightly—whether it is a technical use of the word or not—called this a contempt of this Assembly, a contempt of the members here.

In terms of the minister’s almost “no fault with me” presentation on the library issue, I note that the minister had been asked through questions on notice and also during estimates, “Would increased resources actually mean the libraries could stay open on weekends?” She either avoided answering the question or said in a question on notice that I had presented, “There is no way that funding would fix this problem.” That just makes no sense. That makes no sense at all to me.

Obviously, I support the Canberra Liberals motion that has been presented to us. I will leave others to speak about the seatbelt issue here; my primary concern is about a motion supported by this Assembly where the community has actually spoken very strongly about weakened access to our libraries. I thank Mr Braddock for sponsoring the petition that Mr David Still presented. I note Mr Still is in the gallery here. This petition gathered over 3,500 signatures. So the community itself is very clear that weekend access, Sunday access, is an important part of government delivery of adequate services.

I will just make a note about Ms Cheyne’s amendment. Remarkably, despite criticising us for failures—on relatively minor points, I might say—she did not know which amendment she was moving. But I do note that the one that has been circulated says:

The ACT Government has committed to expanding community access to ACT libraries, including prioritising weekend branch access at Kippax and Erindale from July 2027;

Why would we believe them? Recent news highlights that the government come out at

elections promising something and then fail to deliver it—as the Tuggeranong ice rink has demonstrated.

I am sure the minister thinks this is a very attractive amendment that she has presented. But, frankly, why would we believe you? I support the censure motion.

MS BARRY (Ginninderra) (10.35): In the context of the debates that we had yesterday, I am compelled to offer a few comments. It is one thing to introduce bills based on policies that we might disagree with; it is another thing entirely to introduce a bill with complete disregard and a lack of understanding on long-established legal principles—principles that we must follow. Legal principles are not optional and they are not to be discarded. When we are talking about a retrospective law, it does not matter what the law is; there is a simple principle called the principle of legality. It is fairly straightforward, but it is fundamentally important. There is another principle called the rule of law. The High Court has presided over many challenges to the legalities of retrospective laws.

Let me make it really clear here: this censure is not about the mistake or the error that occurred; it is about the Attorney-General, the highest-ranking legal officer in this territory, who has not followed due process and sent the bill to scrutiny. That is what this censure is about.

In the jurisprudence, our nation's highest court, whose decisions are binding, if we, as legislators, wish to pass laws that have a retrospective effect, there are some basic steps that need to be followed. It is not just full steam ahead; two things must happen to displace presumption against retrospectivity. Yes, the legislative intent is important, but equally important is parliamentary scrutiny—we have one, but we do not have the other. This is because our system had fundamental presumptions against retrospectivity. That means you must displace the presumption by following certain crucial steps. By not doing so, by not following proper parliamentary scrutiny, as I have said, the Attorney-General, who is the territory's highest-ranking officer, has shown complete disregard and disrespect for basic principles of democratic checks and balance. She has no respect for legal conventions, no respect for the rule of law, no respect for the principle of legality and, clearly, no respect for Canberrans.

By avoiding scrutiny and claiming there is no other option here, the Attorney-General has shown her contempt for basic legal principles. This could have been avoided if proper process had been followed and the proposed bill had been scrutinised properly in parliament. It is the minimum and a very easy threshold requirement to satisfy. I must note that there was no real need to rush to introduce or to speed that bill through. But, of course, if the bill went through scrutiny, it would have taken longer to turn on the revenue tap by having the cameras back on.

If the Attorney-General cannot follow basic legal principles, then I am not sure what precedent is being set here. In a time when there is declining trust in our public institutions and elected members, you would expect that our ministers and public officials would do all that they can to hold the public trust in high regard. Sadly, the Attorney-General has not done so in this case and, for those reasons, I support the censure.

MR SPEAKER: The question now is that Mr Braddock's amendments, as amended, be agreed to.

MR BARR(Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Minister for Trade, Investment and the Knowledge Economy, Minister for Tourism and Events, and Minister for Major Projects) (10.40): I indicate that the government will support Mr Braddock's amendment, and I thank the Assembly for their unanimous support of Ms Cheyne's amendment previously that was then incorporated into Mr Braddock's amendment. That provides a pathway forward on the substantive issue that underpins both the previous Assembly discussion and one of the elements that has led to this censure motion being brought forward this morning. I do enjoy the irony of just being handed an amendment from Mr Cocks, needing to go back and retrospectively fix the date, in a censure motion.

Mr Cocks: I am not quite sure you understand what retrospective means.

MR BARR: In this context, an error was identified, Mr Speaker and someone has subsequently come in with a fix—an amendment. I indicate the government's willingness to support Mr Cocks's amendment, because having the correct facts in such a motion is indeed important.

Ms Barry's speech was a reflection on a vote of the Assembly yesterday where the Assembly—not just the government, but a majority of Assembly members—voted to suspend standing orders in order to deal with the legislation that was introduced, and to do so in a manner that would resolve the issue, and to expedite the matter. So the entire tenor of the shadow Attorney-General's speech was a reflection on the majority of members in this place. It was an unnecessary personal attack on the minister, and I think the record should stand to reflect the vote of the Assembly on this matter yesterday. So the minister has not personally dispensed with the usual process; the Assembly voted to do so, and that is a decision of this parliament. So that speech was a reflection on a vote of this parliament, channelled through a censure debate and unnecessarily personally and nastily aimed at the Attorney-General. I do not think that is the sort of culture that this place should be supporting.

For those reasons, the government intends to support the Braddock amendment and we will support the Cocks amendment—and we look forward to the debate on the Emerson amendment that I understand is coming.

Mr Braddock's amendment, as amended agreed to.

MR SPEAKER: The question now is that Mr Parton's motion, as amended, be agreed to.

MR EMERSON(Kurrajong) (10.42): I would like to speak broadly to the motion and then I will speak to my amendment and I might also briefly take the opportunity to speak to the petition which will come up later on as well. I thank Mr Parton for bringing this motion forward this morning. We have heard that these changes are about the viability of libraries in the ACT. We have been speaking a lot about the viability of public assets like libraries. But it is important for us to ask the question of whether community spaces should be expected to be financially viable to begin with. Libraries

are places where people can meet, connect, learn and engage with fellow members of their community without having to spend a dollar—which, of course, is a terrible business model. So we invest in this not because of viability but because it matters—it matters to people in our community.

I acknowledge the deficit in the last financial year and that this area was largely driven by the need to fill vacancies with casual shifts to keep libraries open—that was over \$674,000 in a 12-month period—and that all of this has kind of come about as an attempt to resolve those issues. Those issues have been disruptive for staff, of course, and for our community, and I appreciate the government is working to address this. Where I have struggled—and I think other members also continue to struggle—is in answering the question of why cutting off opening hours in the way that has occurred is absolutely necessary to solve this problem.

The issues identified in the Library ACT Independent Working Group report include rostering arrangements, inequitable access to shifts and associated benefits, accumulated individual working arrangements, difficulty moving staff between branches, leave management pressures and broader systems and workplace culture. I just cannot see how the only possible answer to that list of problems is fewer opening hours, but it is the answer that we have been given—that our community was presented with and that this Assembly has been presented with.

Surely, though—and I know this has been disputed and it was discussed in estimates—these issues could be addressed, if we all agree they should be, through greater investment in libraries and a review of working arrangements to support on the back of that investment. What if we doubled the number of librarians? Could we maintain access? What if we tripled the number of librarians? What if we had 10 times as many library staff? We would have 24-hour libraries. Surely there is a solution to this problem, and I think that was what the Assembly was attempting to give us an opportunity to consider in the motion that was moved in June.

As has been discussed, there are more than 3,500 signatures on that petition that will be tabled this morning. I thank and acknowledge the principal petitioner David Still and its sponsor Mr Braddock for their work on that petition. Our community is sending a clear message: we do not want to see our vital community spaces stripped back. In fact, Canberrans certainly told me they want to see more investment in low-cost and no-cost third spaces—places where we can gather together. But the government has proceeded with this decision regardless, and that is why we are debating the censure motion this morning.

I just want to make sure that I have my views on different elements of the debate on the record. We touched on the seatbelts issue yesterday—and I suppose we will touch on it later today or tomorrow when we debate the bill. I do not think that is grounds for a censure. A mistake was made within the directorate and it is sensible for us to resolve that mistake in the public interest.

What we agreed in the motion—and there was, I think, quite a lot of back and forth and engagement, and I appreciated some of my engagement with Mr Braddock on that motion in June—was essentially to, as I said, give ourselves an opportunity to consider whether more funding, as part of the budget debate, would be capable of addressing the

issues presented by the review of libraries in the ACT. Is there another option other than the option that is been presented and rolled out—which, clearly, our community is unhappy with—that could be pursued with increased investment and then give us as an Assembly an opportunity to vote on that?

I accept the argument that the government is there to govern and that there are decisions that the government needs to make and that will be made without, perhaps, the support of the Assembly at times or without the involvement of the Assembly. But what is clear from the community interest in this issue is that this issue does require, I think, a majority support of the Assembly. The government, yes, is there to govern, but the government governs with the support of the Assembly and members of the Assembly here with the support of our community. So it is important, I think, when issues reach that threshold that we bring them to the Assembly and express a clear opinion—which occurred in June—and that we are given an opportunity to form a consensus on how to solve a problem in good faith. That is not what has occurred because of us not being provided with a potential amendment to the budget bill and another business case that would allow us to make a different decision.

I can accept the minister's argument, which is in the government's response—essentially, that there was not time to do that and that it would have been disruptive for staff and it would have created uncertainty—but I think, if that were the case, this should have been foreseen and we should have had an opportunity to consider this as an Assembly sooner, rather than the changes being announced and the government taking an approach of, “We will just grit our teeth and cop the flak and proceed regardless.” That is where I think there is merit to discussing this motion this morning, and it is why I have prepared my amendment.

The amendment that I have circulated makes one small change—it is the smallest amendment I think I have prepared to date—to replace the word “censures” with “admonishes”. There are precedents for this, of proposed censure motions essentially being downgraded into motions of grave concern. I think the last one that was successfully amended in this way was in 2009, through a motion by Mr Seselja that was effectively downgraded from a censure to an admonishment.

The reason that I think this is appropriate is that, if we are moving and agreeing to censure a minister, we are essentially saying, “If you do this again, then there is probably a no confidence coming on the back of it.” We have had a couple of censures this term. One was for a completely bungled program/project, MyWay+. Everyone agreed that that was appropriate, and I think the censure in that case was appropriate. In the other case, the censure of Ms Berry, it was in relation to what we as an Assembly perceived to be mismanagement across multiple portfolio areas.

In the case before us, I do not think it is a matter of ministerial incompetence or a lack of oversight; it is a matter of us disagreeing with the decision that was made—and I just find it hard to justify that threshold having been met in this matter. I just think they are different. As much as I agree that it is critical for us to make clear that an opinion of the Assembly—which is what a motion is; a majority opinion—should be respected and should be acted upon, if we going to censure every decision that we as an Assembly disagree with, we are only watering down the value or the gravity, I suppose, of a censure motion. I think that is what we risk doing here, which is why I have circulated

an amendment. It is a sensible middle ground. I think it would be sensible of us here in the chamber to support it. I hope it is supported, because I think there have been mistakes made here. There need to be lessons, but I just do not think it is at the point of a censure motion where the next step would be saying that Minister Cheyne is not fit to be a minister. I do not think we have reached that threshold. On that basis, I seek leave to move the amendment circulated in my name.

Leave granted.

MR EMERSON: I move:

In paragraph (7), omit “censures”, substitute “admonishes”.

MR SPEAKER: The question is that Mr Emerson’s amendment to Mr Parton’s motion, as amended, be agreed to.

MRS MORRIS (Brindabella) (10.53): I rise to support the opposition leader’s motion, and to express my disappointment that it has been watered down, specifically with regard to seatbelts. Let me be clear from the outset: seatbelts save lives. Wearing a seatbelt is one of the simplest and most effective things that any of us can do to protect ourselves on the road. But there is another simple truth. When a government exercises the power to punish its citizens, it must do so lawfully. This is a fundamental liberal democratic principle: liberal democratic governments must operate within the confines of the law.

I thank the shadow attorney-general for her very valuable contribution to this debate. I would reflect that it was, indeed, the Attorney-General who moved to suspend the standing orders, notwithstanding the Chief Minister’s comments, for something that the Attorney-General moved.

Seatbelt enforcement commenced in November. Between November and August this year, the government issued 12,850 seatbelt infringement notices. It then discovered that the cameras had not been properly authorised for that purpose. This is not simply a technical loophole that the government likes to present; this is an instrument that provides the government with the lawful basis to inflict punitive measures against Canberrans.

The government demands that Canberrans understand and obey the law. Canberrans are entitled to expect that the government not only meet the same standard, but that they actually lead by example. These infringement notices were not just warning letters; they were substantial fines, accompanied by demerit points, with potentially serious consequences for people’s family budgets, employment and their ability to drive. In fact, the infringement notices that were issued to thousands of Canberrans also carried the threat of criminal convictions for Canberrans who failed to comply.

Thousands of Canberrans have already paid and otherwise resolved their infringements before the government admitted its failure. Let us be clear that this failure from the government has undermined the integrity of and public confidence in an important road safety program, and an enforcement system that was already under strain, with public confidence being undermined because of questions around the reliability of the

technology. Automated enforcement depends on public confidence that the technology works, that every image is assessed fairly, and that innocent motorists are not forced to fight an incorrect penalty under threat of criminal conviction.

The government rightly wants Canberrans to pay for doing the wrong thing. Equally, the government must accept responsibility for doing the wrong thing and not having a lawful basis to inflict punitive measures for issuing almost 12,000 infringement notices without ensuring that the cameras were properly authorised, and for the confusion and loss of confidence that followed.

The minister does deserve to be censured for this. Because wearing a seatbelt is such a critical, fundamental road safety measure, it is critically important that the community has confidence in the system, and in the integrity of this government. We know that this government has an integrity problem. We have seen the corruption scandal that resulted in the former Deputy Chief Minister losing her position, and now we have seen the ACT Labor government inflict punitive measures against Canberrans without having a lawful basis to do so.

These are serious integrity questions. Canberrans expect that their government will be held to account for its behaviour. They expect their government to act with integrity, and to act within the confines of the law, and that is not what has happened here. I commend the opposition leader's motion to the Assembly.

MR SPEAKER: The question is that Mr Emerson's amendment to Mr Parton's motion, as amended, be agreed to.

MR PARTON (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (10.59): Briefly, on the amendment, the Canberra Liberals will not be supporting the amendment from Mr Emerson. This is a censure motion; it is not an admonishment motion. It is either a censure motion or it is not. If Mr Emerson does not wish to support a censure motion, he has the ability to vote against it. We certainly cannot support the amendment from Mr Emerson.

MS CASTLEY(Yerrabi) (10.59): Here we are again; it is another sitting week, and we have another censure motion. It comes as a surprise to exactly no-one, because we already know that the opposition clearly intends to censure, smear and whinge their way to the 2028 election. This, obviously, will not be the last censure motion. Whenever any minister does anything mildly controversial, which we can probably assume will be any measure to address what the Liberals call the "fiscal emergency", we can probably expect they will find themselves to be the subject of another Liberal censure motion, regardless of whether it stacks up.

Apparently, that is the Liberal strategy now, and what is remarkable is that it is not a winning strategy. It was a strategy that they used last term and Canberrans voted against it, spectacularly. The usual approach of winning government is to identify problems in the community that are not being addressed, develop solutions, and persuade voters to support those changes. It is a lot of hard work. It requires close engagement with the community, an understanding of policy options, constraints and trade-offs, and an ability to persuade people of an argument. That takes time, effort, focus and discipline. While there are some very decent, hardworking, principled members of the opposition

who are up for that, some simply find the actual work of politics too hard and too boring. They are attracted to the excitement of censures and smears, but it is an electoral dead end, even at the best of times.

For the Canberra Liberals, these are definitely not the best of times. As the July Demos poll demonstrated, the Liberals have already lost one-third of the people who supported them at the last election—and not lost to a party, but essentially to an empty chair. What I have heard from voters, particularly those who are frustrated and are walking away from the Liberals, is that they want an opposition focused on them—the community—not themselves. Those voters hate cheap, nasty, lazy politics and, when they see it, they stop listening and move their votes elsewhere. That is why this strategy is the wrong call.

While the Liberals have not surprised me, the Greens have. They have been more willing than I expected to enable the Liberals in this strategy of the nasty, personal politics. It goes against the impression that I had of the Greens as MLAs, as individuals in their party. I believed they stood for decency and kindness, but I cannot reconcile that with their support for the Liberals' nasty approach to politics. If you censure one minister for this, if you smear another as corrupt, and if you suggest another is in someone's pocket, eventually, voters will accept that conduct as normal. Some voters will demand more of it. More extreme candidates will get elected because of it. It will coarsen and corrode our politics, and it will diminish our ability to work together and get good things done for the community.

I encourage the Greens to reflect on this next time a Liberal MLA approaches them with such a motion. Don't just think about the motion itself. Don't just think about whatever fleeting reputational harm you might inflict on Labor. Think about the long-term consequences of what we are doing here in this place. Think about your own values. Think about the kind of politics that you want in the ACT, and whether motions like this one contribute to that end or detract from it. Look at the time we have spent here this morning and the amendments that have had to be circulated. I do not think we want to go down that path.

Finally, I want to say something about the minister who is targeted in this motion. Of course, Ms Cheyne and I disagree about many things. Our philosophy and values are quite different. The policies she champions and the decisions she takes are not necessarily the ones that I would bring or even support. Despite our disagreements, I have come to respect and value the minister as a person and the role she takes as the minister. She is a good and decent person, ferociously hardworking, and absolutely committed to trying to do the right thing here, as she has spoken about in her speech today, and yesterday in the discussion about seatbelt fines.

Members might disagree with the decision she took on libraries, and that is fair enough. But a disagreement is not grounds for censure, and I think Mr Emerson articulated that beautifully in his amendment and in the words that he spoke earlier.

Members might think that it is deeply frustrating that an error like seatbelt cameras ever happened, but we all know that officials make mistakes. They have done so before. They will do so in the future. I completely accept the argument that Westminster conventions mean that ministers are responsible for the conduct and the failure of their

officials, but responsibility does not automatically mean resignation or censure. Responsibility means being up-front about the problem, resolving the problem, and ensuring that it does not happen again.

As house practice explains, Westminster conventions distinguish between answerability and personal culpability. If the Liberals or the Greens could point to an error or a failing by the minister herself, it would be a different story, but they have not. After all, that is why Kate Carnell and Gary Humphries were not censured back in 1997, when Mr Humphries brought amendments to retrospectively validate ambulance fees that had been unlawfully collected for two years. The source of that error was officials working under Kate Carnell, as the health minister. Everyone accepted that a mistake had been made, that the minister had an obligation to explain, and that the situation needed resolution—which is what happened then, and now, and it is exactly how the system of accountability ought to work.

I do not believe there are grounds for censure over this issue, which means I will not be supporting the motion, which should never have been brought. I will be supporting Mr Emerson's amendment.

MR SPEAKER: The question is that Mr Emerson's amendment to Mr Parton's motion, as amended, be agreed to.

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (11.06): I will touch briefly on the amendment, because Mr Emerson made some interesting comments. I think his interpretation of some things is a little off, because Mr Emerson seems to be applying the same threshold test to a censure motion that would apply to a no-confidence motion. I am afraid that a censure is not simply a warning shot across the bow at a minister who has failed, with a no-confidence coming later. That is not what a censure motion is about. A censure motion is a fundamental, important message to the government that they have fallen short, and that they have not complied with the expectations of the Assembly—and, indeed, in this case, very clearly, of the community—and a censure motion is absolutely justified.

It is also important to recognise that Mr Emerson raised the history, and he mentioned the 2009 censure motion that was effectively downgraded to an admonishment. That was a censure, as I am sure the Chief Minister recalls, of Mr Barr. That was a censure that was moved by the opposition. It was not a downgrade that was moved by the opposition. It was then downgraded by someone with a supply and confidence agreement with the government. Mr Speaker, it starts to make you wonder, as Mr Emerson rushes to the defence of the government here, in seeking to downgrade the motion, exactly what the cost of some of those supply and confidence agreements might be.

This is not about what the Independents say is the appropriate threshold. This is about the conduct of the government and the minister. Being a minister, being a member of the executive, is a privilege. It is a privilege that is essentially subservient to the parliament, and it does not ride across the top of the parliament. The parliament should be primary, and the parliament in this instance has sent very clear messages.

I will touch briefly on seatbelts, because I think this is important. The minister had been

trotting out this defensive line, that the Chief Minister repeated today, that the legislation passed unanimously; there was a unanimous vote for this legislation. There was not. There was no vote. There was no division where all the votes were counted. What is more, it is interesting because this is the only time that the minister has decided to call votes “unanimous”. There are plenty of votes that pass on the voices, where the dissenting names are not recorded.

I understand that it is in the minister’s interest to call it “unanimous”. The minister’s defence on seatbelt cameras is essentially that she is trying to pass ownership to the rest of the Assembly. Frankly, that is a pretty desperate attempt to shift responsibility. We did not oppose those cameras. What we did not support was the minister getting the law wrong. We did not support the implementation stage because our spokesperson, Mr Milligan, stood in this chamber during that debate and raised serious concerns that the implementation had to be fair. What is more, Mr Milligan called on the government to review the implementation after six months, so those concerns about implementation have been there all along, and it is the implementation of those laws that went wrong.

Canberrans are exhausted. They are tired of Labor leaders who change their position. Frankly, this is a government that change their position all the time. They have consistently stood in this place and in front of the community, and they have told the community that they would not deliver deep cuts. There would be no deep cuts to the public service. They have told the community they could afford to do it all. But when the rubber is hitting the road, as the interest bill bites, that is not what the government is doing. The minister has walked away from that commitment. She has walked away from what this Assembly called on her to do, specifically in regard to libraries, and that deserves a censure.

The community expect the government to do what they have said they would do. They never went to an election saying they were going to cut libraries. They told the world that everyone else was going to be responsible for cuts, but they are the ones delivering the cuts. They should be censured. This minister should be censured. That is holding the government to account and, until such time as we have an election and we can change the government, that is what we will continue to do.

Mr Speaker, I seek leave to move the amendment circulated in my name.

MR SPEAKER: Before you do that, we will deal with Mr Emerson’s amendment; then we will have a clear motion, as amended. The question is that Mr Emerson’s amendment to Mr Parton’s motion, as amended, be agreed to.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (11.12): To Mr Emerson: I appreciate the intent in his amendment with the change to “admonishment”. There is a challenge here as to what criteria to apply when determining whether something should be a censure, admonishment or notes for concern—or whatever creative wordplay you may wish to utilise. I agree with Mr Emerson that what we are talking about today is not to the same level of concern as previous censures we have seen this term, but the Greens maintain there is an important principle here, hence we will not be supporting Mr Emerson’s amendments.

Before I go on, I would just like to entirely acknowledge the minister’s comments that

she made earlier in this chamber—what she stated both in the chamber and in private—about the challenges of meeting some of the clauses when we were debating the amended motion on 12 June. However, the challenge here is the complete lack of flexibility or change of course to engage with the very real concerns of the Canberra community. I value the debates we have and want these debates to mean something in this place, where we can have not just a contest of ideas but also collaboration and collective problem-solving on behalf of the people of Canberra—where democracy is vibrant and where we represent the people of Canberra.

We do not wish to see, for the remainder of the term, motions passed by this Assembly that are disregarded. So it is on that principle that we cannot support the downgrade of the censure to admonishment.

I would also like to note Ms Castley's comments and simply invite her to examine her previous actions in this place, because I unapologetically believe that motions in this place must mean something, and hence I am standing on that principle today.

I would also like to note that previous comments the minister made while she was moving her amendment displayed the limitations of the government's commitment in terms of reopening the libraries, a commitment heavily caveated and subject to numerous conditions. In the meantime, whilst we are debating this, the service provided by ACT Libraries to Canberrans has been diminished.

MS CHEYNE(Ginninderra—Manager of Government Business, Attorney-General, Minister for City and Government Services, and Minister for Transport) (11.14): I appreciate the additional comments that have been made. First of all, humbly, to Mr Emerson: I have certainly not been backwards in coming forward about some of your late amendments, and I will reflect on that in the future. I certainly appreciate it, and I do value the words that you put and the thought that you have put into arriving at your position—thank you.

Ms Castley, I very much appreciate your kind words as well, and I certainly agree with the warning that you have asked people to take heed of about thresholds and precedents.

I think that there are some things to go to here. I will address Ms Carrick's amendment as well. There seems to be a suggestion, Mr Speaker, that the government did not respond to the motion at all. And, again, we did—extensively. It is actually an extensive response, and there has been such a complete lack of regard to what is in that response that I am actually going to have to put it on the record here, while everyone is here. I would certainly ask the Greens to think carefully about what they mean by my "complete lack of flexibility". Mr Cocks just said that we do not want ministers changing their minds. Well, which is it? Which is it? What is the standard that the non-executive members in this place are trying to apply here?

I do appreciate that Mr Still is here. I acknowledge the extensive advocacy that he has undertaken and the intent of it, and 3½ thousand signatories is incredible. Indeed, I support the intent of that petition, and I support so much of what is in that petition. But there is a real sense—and I am glad that Mr Still is here to hear this—including in some of the remarks from Mr Emerson, and certainly from Mr Braddock, in which this is just blowing my brain! The continued suggestion is that this decision is

bloody-mindedness: that perhaps I did not get the strength of feeling; that I am not listening; that my electorate, in particular, needs to send me a message, and I know Mr Still, in particular, has led that charge.

Mr Speaker, I did not make the decision lightly. It is not that I did not care about Kippax or Belconnen. It is not that I did not realise there would be a strong response across the community. I am a minister responsible for not just my electorate but the city. I am responsible for nine libraries, for the people who run them and for a service the whole city should be able to rely on. And at the start of this term, they could not. Sure, I did not take it to the election, because the head of the problem did not arrive, really, until the first quarter of last year. And when it did, I did something about it. In fact, the Assembly asked me to, and I did. When 37 recommendations came through, I agreed to do every single one of them, and that included looking at opening hours, viability and roster.

If reliability could have been achieved just by hiring more staff, I would have done it. In fact, we had tried to do that. In one year, we spent almost \$700,000 on casuals and labour-hire, supporting the old roster model and opening hours. And branches still closed. We had more staff; there was more funding, and branches still closed! So to Mr Cain and to others who say that we should have just funded it more—that we should just grin and bear it—let’s be real here. If there were another option, surely, I would have taken it.

We all know my deep dives and how much I spend thinking about things. If I thought there was another option, surely, I would have done it. I would not have set myself up for this if there was any other way. But there was not. I looked at it from every angle—every angle, over and over, Mr Speaker. It is why I took responsibility for writing back to every single person who wrote to me. I wrote back to them myself, because I had spent so long trying to understand, “Is there any other way?” No, there was not.

The motion has not been disregarded—it has not. So much has been responded to. Ms Carrick, I am, honestly, so deeply disappointed by this amendment—“... the Government did not provide an assessment on the impact on services and amenities from relocating Access Canberra into the Woden Library”—and that that is the reason for the censure.

Well, actually, this is what the response says:

The design process for the proposed relocation of Access Canberra services into Woden Library has commenced. A full assessment cannot be completed until the design has progressed sufficiently. The assessment will consider impacts on library floor space, collections and shelving, seating and study capacity—

Et cetera—

The co-location will be designed to protect the identity and amenity of the library and minimise impacts on library users. Further information will be provided when the design and impact assessment are sufficiently developed.

I appreciate that she wanted it in a particular timeframe. I could not meet that timeframe. So what is it? Do people just want me to sketch something out or do they

actually want us to work with them, which my office has done! Officials have sat down and briefed her, and yet this amendment—really?

The government response is comprehensive—but Mr Braddock suggested otherwise, with my “complete inflexibility”—and it explained why. I am not sure how many more times I can. I know that everyone wants to think that this is just about funding and that this is just about staff. It is not. If we had funded the continuation of the arrangements that we had, the underlying workplace culture would have been unchanged. We had got to a point of individual exceptions and short-term responses, and it was not working. It was not working. Many of the arrangements had been established for understandable reasons, but their combined effect had reduced management’s capacity to respond. A single absence could leave a branch below its minimum staffing requirement, even where employees were available elsewhere in the network. That is not a funding issue. It is not a staffing issue. That is a wholesale review of how they are operating and of how we can reset and start from a stable foundation. I have never suggested every employee preferred every element of the final model, but if we preserved every former arrangement just by adding dollars on top of it, it still would have preserved the complexity, inequity and fragility that the reform was supposed to address.

The new arrangements have been so iterative. They have been so scrutinised, especially by me. I have stood by them because there is no other option. We needed a reliable, fair and sustainable service first. Once we have that reformed model—that model that is now in place—that gets us to a point where we can look at: “What else can we do? How else can we respond flexibly? How can we innovate?” I could not do that on a model that was not fit for purpose and that was not serving the community, and I do not believe that that meets the threshold for censure.

MR SPEAKER: The question is that Mr Emerson’s amendment to Mr Parton’s motion, as amended, be agreed to.

MS TOUGH(Brindabella—Minister for Human Rights, Minister for Community Services, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Women, Seniors and Veterans, and Minister for the Prevention of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence) (11.24): I want to take the chance to talk about the work of Minister Cheyne and her office with libraries throughout this whole period.

Libraries are my happy place. Everyone in here knows that I grew up in council-run public libraries, because my mum is a librarian. I know the value to our community of libraries. I have spent many afternoons after school, Saturday mornings, sick days and school holidays—a lot of time—in libraries. I still spend a lot of time in libraries.

So, when libraries were closing without notice, I became really concerned for the Libraries ACT staff and for our community who access those services. I became really concerned for the staff who were not going to work or could not go to another library because of the closures, and for the constituents. Members of the community would call me and say, “I just caught the bus to this library, and the library is not open. Where should I go?”

I really want to thank the independent working group and the Libraries ACT staff who responded to that and worked through, “What is the underlying problem here and what

can be done?” I thank them for all the work they put into looking at the libraries as a whole—not as individual branches but the whole system—and for asking, “What can we do?” and for putting those recommendations to government.

This is why I really want to put on the record my thanks to Minister Cheyne and her office for this work. I read that report and I, and members of my community, became concerned for the future of Erindale library and Civic library from reading that report. Rather than putting my head in the sand and saying “oh well”, I went to Minister Cheyne and her office. I spent so much time in conversation with the minister and her office around how we make sure individual branches are not closing. This is a systemic thing that actually supports our library staff and our community to have access, and in some cases to have improved access. I want to put on record my thanks for all that time and those conversations. I know how much it pains you to make changes, but you have created a stronger system, and from here we can work. There is a chance to work to improve access in the future, now that we have got a stronger base to start from. We have book lockers coming, which I am personally really excited about, as someone who reads a lot of books and uses libraries, around being busy, to drop off and pick up.

This was a systemic look at libraries, through the working group and through the minister, so that there is access across our city. So I want to talk about some of the positive changes that have come from this new roster—particularly, as I have heard, in Erindale, and, I understand, in Gungahlin and a few other libraries as well, from talking to so many people in my community. Erindale library used to open at 10 am on a weekday; it now opens at 9am, and there is a queue out the front of mostly families with young kids who have dropped older kids at school. They can now go to the library without having to go home or find somewhere else to go first. Anyone with young kids knows that when you leave the house in the morning, you do not want to have to go home and go back out again. Your day is ruined when you have to do that.

A number of families I have spoken to have said, “Actually, this is great opening at nine, because I’m dropping the older kid at school. The younger kid and I are going to the library and using that time. We are out of the house and we are doing things.” This has happened because we had a systemic look at how libraries are opening, and now they are open at 9 am on weekdays, and I know families are using that service at Erindale and Gungahlin, and I am sure probably other libraries as well—they are just the two I am aware of where that is happening.

There are positives. This was never a set and forget exercise—“Hey, we’ve made some changes. It’s done, fixed, sorted, tick”. No. The minister has always said, “We need to make changes. We need to set the system right, and then from here we can move forward.” I want to put on the record that I really appreciate all the work the minister has done in how we improve access across the city because of this—and to her office as well.

I also want to finish on another note, from my experience as government whip, sitting on the backbench and moving up to the ministry. Every week we sit here in this Assembly, and motions are passed calling on the government to take actions that would result in expense to government if followed. I have done it. Every non-executive member in this place has done it—I am pretty sure; I will have to double-check. A lot of the time those motions pass, and they call on the government to spend money to do

something. But that is an expression of opinion of the Assembly. It is not binding on the government to then go and spend the money. We call on the government to look into something and to explore what can be done. It is an expression of opinion of the Assembly. I know, every time I have done it, I hope my colleagues go and spend that money and do it, but it is not binding on the government to do it. It is the government's prerogative to spend money, not the Assembly's. I want to put that on the record.

I do not support the censure of my colleague. I appreciate Mr Emerson's amendment. I want to finish by saying that Minister Cheyne is doing her job, and this feels a bit like political theatre this morning.

MR SPEAKER: The question is that Mr Emerson's proposed amendment to Mr Parton's motion, as amended, be agreed to.

MS CLAY(Ginninderra) (11.30): I will speak once, and I will speak briefly. Our job here in parliament is to take forward the voice of the community. We had really clear concerns from the community on this. People did not want to lose their only Saturday operating hours. We have got constituents who are lodging human rights complaints because they cannot access the branches that are open on Saturday. The branches that they had access to were accessible for them. We have thousands of people who said that this is a problem for them. We know, at least, at one of those branches that the Saturday closure was the busiest time; it was the peak time for that library. The Assembly took that forward. When ministers have trouble implementing, come back and say, "We can't do this by this date—we could not pause the library closure because we have already made roster decisions."

Government members interjecting—

MS CLAY: That would have been acceptable—and if you had come back with an undertaking to do the thing and reopen the branches by set date. That is actually what the community expected from us. They needed to know that the libraries will reopen on the weekends. If there was a delay, it would have been acceptable, but that is not what we got.

MR BARR(Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Minister for Trade, Investment and the Knowledge Economy, Minister for Tourism and Events, and Minister for Major Projects) (11.32): Speaking to the amendment, and perhaps to try and close some of the circles that the debate is going in, I have found myself in this position of being faced with having to vote to admonish myself, versus being censured. I do thank Mr Cocks for the history lesson in relation to 2009. For those who were not here then, the issue was about building and calling in the Canberra Hospital multistorey car park. I still stand by my decision to do that, because I think that was a very important piece of infrastructure for the community.

I did end up having to vote to admonish myself for doing that. Perhaps the greatest irony, which many members of this place will certainly enjoy, given recent events, was that my strongest supporter, and the person who spoke very passionately in this Assembly in my defence, was Jon Stanhope. Mr Speaker, if you are in politics for a long time, you will see and hear everything.

For Mr Emerson to bring forward "admonishes" as an alternative form of language for

this place is not unprecedented. The government would be inclined to support that, given the two options—

Mr Cain: Why would you support it? Why not just oppose it?

MR BARR: Given the two options, which is what I have just explained, Mr Cain. It does not mean that we believe the minister should be admonished—we hold a different view—but we certainly believe that the minister should not be censured.

Mr Cain interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Mr Cain, address your comments through me.

MR BARR: That addresses our position in relation to the Emerson amendment. On the more substantive issue that is being discussed, I would hope it would be clear for members of the Assembly and the community in relation to a pathway forward from here. That is exactly what the minister's amendment—and I thank the Assembly for supporting it—outlines. It will go to address the issues that Ms Carrick has raised in her amendment that we are yet to discuss, in terms of a process as to how all these matters can be considered.

To be clear, the government understands the issues that have been raised by both petitioners and Assembly members. The minister has outlined why she took the decisions that she did. In order to create stability, we now have an opportunity to move forward. We do not need to censure the minister in order to take that opportunity to move forward. We intend, through the process that the Assembly has now supported, to provide a further update in March to consider the range of issues—that will include resourcing, obviously—ahead of the budget in 2027. It is the minister's intent to continue to strengthen the library service. Each of the elements contained within the amendment that has now been supported by the Assembly will proceed.

We think this is a positive way forward. I thank members for the largely constructive way in which this debate has occurred this morning. As a veteran of this place, not all censure motions are conducted in such a way that speakers are largely heard in silence and where more substantive issues of policy are discussed, rather than personal attacks. This morning, I am reasonably proud of how this debate has occurred. I think it is a reflection of what I hope is a direction of goodwill in this place.

Given it would appear that the two options before us this morning are either to admonish or censure the minister, we will settle for admonishment over censure. What we are genuinely trying to do is find a way forward. I do not think the community are particularly interested in what name other members call the minister. They are more interested in an actual outcome in relation to library services, and at least an outcome of this morning is a pathway forward on that issue. I hope that clarifies our position in relation to the forthcoming votes.

Question put:

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

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 10

Noes 11

Andrew Barr	Michael Pettersson	Chiaka Barry	Jeremy Hanson
Leanne Castley	Chris Steel	Andrew Braddock	Deborah Morris
Tara Cheyne	Rachel Stephen-Smith	Peter Cain	Laura Nuttall
Thomas Emerson	Caitlin Tough	Fiona Carrick	Mark Parton
Suzanne Orr		Jo Clay	Rebecca Vassarotti
Marisa Paterson		Ed Cocks	

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Emerson's proposed amendment to **Mr Parton's** motion, as amended, negatived.

MR SPEAKER: The question now is that Mr Parton's motion, as amended, be agreed to.

MR COCKS(Murrumbidgee) (11.40), by leave: I move the following amendment:

Omit paragraph (1), substitute:

“(1) notes that on 12 June this year, the Assembly passed a motion calling for the Government to pause the Sunday library closures;”.

This is a pretty straightforward amendment that simply adjusts a typographical error in the motion as originally circulated. I want to take this opportunity to express some disappointment with, in particular, the Chief Minister's approach to this motion, in seeking to make light of the seriousness with which a censure motion is handled.

This is an absolutely serious motion. It deserves the respect in which most of the debate has proceeded. It is important to recognise that this is not some retrospective adjustment, as the Chief Minister tried to characterise it. This is an adjustment contemporaneously, to make sure that the motion is accurate.

It is very important, as we proceed towards a vote at the end of this process, that every member here recognises that this is serious. It is not something to joke and laugh about. It is not a common step for the Assembly to choose to censure a minister. It has not been common across the history of the Assembly to do so. It is important that we get it right, and it is important that what is understood is exactly what happened, when and why this Assembly is censuring the minister, and this is a simple amendment that does so.

MR SPEAKER: The question is that Mr Cocks's proposed amendment to Mr Parton's motion, as amended, be agreed to.

MR BARR(Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Minister for Trade, Investment and the Knowledge Economy, Minister for Tourism and Events, and Minister for Major Projects) (11.42): As I foreshadowed, the government will support the amendment, because it corrects a factual error in the original motion. Sometimes I wonder whether anyone listens to anyone in this place, because I just cannot accept Mr Cocks's characterisation of my contribution to this debate in that way. I will say no more.

Mr Cocks's amendment agreed to.

MR SPEAKER: The question now is that Mr Parton's motion, as amended, be agreed to.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH(Kurrajong—Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Education, Minister for Child Development and Wellbeing, Minister for Finance, Minister for the Public Service and Minister for Health Infrastructure) (11.43): I will speak very briefly. I, like others, cannot allow this debate to go uncommented on, for two reasons. Mr Cocks talked about the importance of sticking to our commitments, but apparently the commitments that ministers make to public servants are not commitments that need to be stuck to.

Ms Cheyne made a commitment to the staff who work in our libraries that a review would be undertaken, that that would be treated seriously, that staff would be engaged in how to respond to that review, that their views on this matter would be listened to and taken seriously, and that they would be respected through this process.

I made the point in the debate in June that other members of this place have completely ignored the fact that these changes have been made in partnership with our hardworking public servants who keep our library services functioning and who understood that the way they were functioning previously was not sustainable.

Mr Emerson said, "Just employ more librarians." Librarians are highly skilled staff. They do not grow on trees. A common thing across this Assembly for non-government members is to say, "Just employ more highly skilled staff," often in areas of workforce shortage or where the system itself is the fundamental problem. Ms Cheyne has worked incredibly hard to address the fundamental problem, in partnership with staff, to build, as she has said, and as the Chief Minister has said, a sustainable platform for further future expansion of library services, which she has now outlined in her amendment and in her very substantial response yesterday that she tabled and spoke to.

It cannot be the case that this Assembly can call on a minister to do something that is impossible or breaches faith with the public service, something about which the minister, in the debate on that motion, said that what they were being asked to do was impossible, and that they are then censured for not delivering the impossible because this place thinks it knows best as to what is possible and not possible, despite every piece of evidence.

The Greens are constantly going on about how they are evidence based, that they make decisions on the basis of evidence and that they put forward policies on the basis of evidence. But when ministers provide substantial evidence of the reasoning for the decisions they are making, they work with staff, and they are very clear about that, that evidence is completely ignored.

It is frustrating in the extreme that Mr Emerson's very reasonable amendment has not been supported in this place, and that it seems the minister is now going to be censured for not doing something that she was 100 per cent clear that she could not do, and that would have, if she had done it, failed to deliver a sustainable service and completely

breached faith with the hardworking library staff who deliver these services to Canberrans. That is extraordinary.

It is extraordinary that this place will censure a minister for doing their job, actually, with extreme diligence, honesty and respect for our public service. I am totally backing what Ms Castley said about this approach. It is extraordinary. I am very disappointed in members of this place—apart from the Canberra Liberals, who are always going to—who voted against Mr Emerson’s amendment.

MS CARRICK(Murrumbidgee) (11.48), by leave: I move the following amendments to the motion, as amended, together:

1. After paragraph (2), insert:

“(3) further notes despite the Assembly motion, the Government did not provide an assessment on the impact on services and amenities from relocating Access Canberra into the Woden Library;”.

2. In paragraph (7), after “ACT Library closures”, insert:

“and not providing an assessment on the impact on services and amenities from relocating Access Canberra into the Woden library”.

I rise to support this motion because accountability to the Assembly is fundamental to responsible government. This matter is not about whether members agree or disagree with the government’s decision on library services. It is about whether the minister complied with a clear request of the Assembly. If the scrutiny and motions of the Assembly can be ignored, I am concerned about the precedent that this sets.

On 12 June, the Assembly agreed to a motion requiring the government to provide specific information about library services and the consequences of its decisions. Among those requests was an assessment of the impact of relocating Access Canberra into the Woden Library and a pause to the implementation of the proposed opening hours changes until the passage of the 2026-2027 Appropriation Bill. The minister’s response demonstrates that those requests were not fully met. The motion also asked for an update on planning for the Molonglo library, and I expect an update on the planning for the Molonglo library by the last sitting day in September, as requested by the Assembly in the motion.

Most significantly, the Assembly requested an assessment of the impacts of relocating Access Canberra into the Woden Library. The government’s response did not provide that assessment. Instead, the response stated that a full assessment could not yet be completed because the design had not progressed sufficiently. That is not the assessment that the Assembly requested. The Assembly sought information about the impacts on library users, library services and community amenity.

The response does not tell us what will happen to meeting rooms, study spaces, community facilities or library capacity. It does not tell us how Access Canberra customers’ waiting areas will be accommodated in the library. It does not tell us whether library space or services will be reduced or altered to accommodate Access Canberra customers. It simply tells us that these matters will be considered later.

The library has a café, and I have a representation from a constituent to operate it, but

we do not know whether it will survive the co-location. This is not particularly concerning, because the government has already decided to proceed with the co-location. It is a budget measure without any evidence at all.

The government has confirmed, through questions on notice, that this proposal was driven by the expiry of the Access Canberra lease and the opportunity to reduce government costs. Yet the community has not seen the business case, the options analysis or any evidence demonstrating that this is the best outcome for library users. The Woden and Weston Creek community was not consulted before the decision was announced through the budget process.

I thank the minister for the briefing from her staff. They told me about the benefits of co-locating government services for the library and Access Canberra. So which is it—the lease expiring, or to save money in the budget? There is another QoN that says, “The preferred option of relocating the Access Canberra shopfront to the Woden Library not only supports efficiency in consolidating accommodation and services, it also reflects the recommendations of the independent working group report into Libraries ACT in supporting co-location of services as well as the ACTPS 2025 report.” It goes on to refer to a few benefits: “Enhanced community access to services through co-location of government services, providing customers with a more integrated and convenient service experience.”

Many of our residents have said there is a difference between library services, which are about community development, and Access Canberra services, which are to do with life admin—commercial, paying your bills. They are different services.

The Access Canberra lease for Tuggeranong and Belconnen Access Canberra run out this term. Will the residents in these areas also get the benefits of relocation? Will Dickson residents also get the benefit of relocation of their Access Canberra into the library? Which is it? A lease expiring, optimisation of government accommodation, or benefits to the community of co-locating government services? How can the Assembly assess the merits of this decision when the assessment has not been completed, and the evidence has not been released?

The minister also failed to comply with the Assembly’s request to pause implementation of the proposed opening hours changes until passage of the appropriation bill. Instead, the changes were implemented before the Assembly had the opportunity to consider the budget. As a consequence, Civic, Erindale and Kippax libraries lost weekend opening hours. Sunday access across the network ceased, and communities were presented with a *fait accompli* before the budget debate had concluded. The Assembly requested a pause. The government chose not to pause.

Members may support or oppose those opening hours decisions. That is a separate debate. The issue before us today is whether the clearly expressed will of the Assembly was respected. Fundamentally, the Assembly is requesting transparency, yet the government has not released a business case for relocating Access Canberra into the Woden Library, nor has it released an assessment of the impact on the services and the community.

Libraries are critical community infrastructure. They support literacy, learning, social

connection and inclusion. Decisions affecting those services must be supported by evidence and be subject to proper scrutiny. When the Assembly requests information and assessments, ministers have an obligation to provide them. When the Assembly requests a pause to implementation, ministers should not simply proceed as though the requests do not matter.

This censure is not about politics; it is about accountability, transparency and respect for the authority of the Assembly. For those reasons, I support the motion.

MR SPEAKER: The question now is that Ms Carrick's amendments to Mr Parton's motion, as amended, be agreed to.

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage, and Minister for Sport and Recreation) (11.55): This motion and the amendments have everything to do with politics and not accountability. Minister Cheyne has been very clear, accountable, transparent and upfront with the Assembly about the challenges facing Libraries ACT. She has made numerous statements in this place that has made herself and the public service accountable in response to the resolution that this motion refers to, upon presenting the findings of the Libraries ACT Independent Working Group and over numerous motions, petitions and debates in this place. She has also been clear about the work that is occurring in the future, further work underway to address issues raised by the Assembly, including the further design work that is occurring at Woden library and the transition of Access Canberra.

Everyone in this place values the role and importance of libraries. We know the importance of libraries as community hubs and as a place of social connection, but let us be clear what the Assembly has asked the minister to do. It has demanded that she present a business case and an amendment to the Appropriation Act to magically facilitate the wishes of the Assembly. She has been very upfront and clear about the challenges of being able to do so from the beginning. It is surprising to me that those opposite and those on the crossbench have been so belligerent in their desperation for the minister to magically make sure libraries are open on Sundays without any of the solutions that would be able to support the workforce to deliver a reliable and regular service. That is not just about funding. It is about a range of other issues around rostering, all of which has been consulted on with the workforce.

The minister has laid out the issues and presented them transparently. She has been clear that providing more money, the approach which this Assembly seems to believe will magically solve all of the issues, is not what is preventing her from delivering the service that the Assembly has asked for. Mr Speaker, it is a fundamental principle of Westminster government that it is the government that presents appropriations, not the opposition or the crossbench. The Assembly can express its views. They can do that. They can express views about how the government should allocate resources, should prioritise expenditure or should otherwise deliver services. But it cannot demand that a minister, especially a minister who is not the Treasurer, make additional appropriations available or present business cases at a whim.

If the Assembly intends to censure Minister Cheyne today, then it should be very mindful of the practice that this establishes. The minister has been forthright,

transparent, accountable and upfront about the issues at play. She has provided the information to the Assembly for us to understand the decisions that have been made and the factors that have brought us here. If the pattern that we establish today is that after all of that, the Assembly will still condemn or censure a minister for doing their job, then there needs to be a reflection on what that means going forward, of the limitation that that places on good government and the flow-on effect of the fundamental principles that underpin the system of Westminster government here in the Assembly.

Minister Cheyne is one of the hardest working members in this place. She works tirelessly to support the voice of workers, deliver quality services and make our city better. What do we have instead from the opposition? A motion that undermines the years of strong bipartisanship when it comes to Vision Zero and road safety, and a motion which completely undermines our ACT library services and making sure that we have a reliable service that is available to Canberrans going forward, which the government continues to look to expand. And, of course, it shows that nothing has changed in terms of the political games and the tricks that the opposition has brought to this place in censure motions time and time again. Those who have fallen for it on the crossbench should be condemned for supporting it today. Canberrans deserve better than that.

Question put:

That **Ms Carrick's** proposed amendments to **Mr Parton's** motion, as amended, be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 12

Chiaka Barry	Jeremy Hanson
Andrew Braddock	Deborah Morris
Peter Cain	Laura Nuttall
Fiona Carrick	Mark Parton
Jo Clay	Rebecca Vassarotti
Ed Cocks	
Thomas Emerson	

Noes 9

Andrew Barr
Leanne Castley
Tara Cheyne
Suzanne Orr
Marisa Paterson
Michael Pettersson
Chris Steel
Rachel Smith
Stephen- Caitlin Tough

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Ms Carrick's proposed amendments to Mr Parton's motion, as amended, agreed to.

MR SPEAKER: The question now is that Mr Parton's motion, as amended by Mr Braddock's amendments, Mr Cocks's amendment and Ms Carrick's amendments, be agreed to.

MR PARTON(Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (12.01): Moving to censure a

minister is a big thing. In my 10 years here, there have been very few of them moved. Canberra Liberals, the ACT Greens and Ms Carrick feel strongly enough about this matter that we will be voting to censure the minister. I do find it quite remarkable that Mr Emerson and Ms Castley have attempted to water the motion down and I am assuming will not be voting for it. I understand that Mr Emerson has a supply and confidence agreement with Labor. I was not aware of any such formal agreement between Ms Castley and the Chief Minister and if such agreement exists, I think it should have a degree of transparency attached to it.

I will quote the former Leader of the Opposition in this place on 30 October 2025 and I will quote her directly:

So the opposition will be enthusiastically supporting the censure motion today. If the Chief Minister continues to protect his ministers when he should step up and hold them accountable, we will be moving and supporting more censure motions in the future. It is what the community expects and it is what they deserve, and so that is what we will deliver.

Ms Castley, Leader of the Opposition at that stage on October 30, 2025.

Question put:

That the motion, as amended, be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 13

Chiaka Barry	Elizabeth Lee
Andrew Braddock	James Milligan
Peter Cain	Deborah Morris
Fiona Carrick	Laura Nuttall
Jo Clay	Mark Parton
Ed Cocks	Rebecca Vassarotti
Jeremy Hanson	

Noes 10

Andrew Barr
Leanne Castley
Tara Cheyne
Thomas Emerson
Suzanne Orr
Marisa Paterson
Michael Pettersson
Chris Steel
Rachel Stephen-Smith
Caitlin Tough

Question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Petitions

The following petitions were lodged for presentation:

Libraries ACT—funding—petitions 65-26 and 86-26

By Mr Braddock, from 3,557 and 104 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 importance of maintaining weekend access to ACT public libraries.

The Government announced on 5 June that Civic, Erindale and Kippax libraries will lose all weekend hours. We are also concerned that these changes are resulting in no ACT public library being open on Sundays, significantly reducing access to an essential public service.

Public libraries are essential community spaces that support literacy, lifelong learning, social connection, inclusion and wellbeing. Through free and low-cost programs, resources and activities, they provide safe and welcoming places for children and families, help bridge the digital divide, reduce social isolation, and enable people of all ages and backgrounds to participate fully in community life.

For many ACT residents, including working families, students and carers, weekends are the only practical opportunity to access library services. Reduced weekend access would also impact participation in popular community programs, such as the much-loved Giggle and Wiggle program held on Saturday mornings at Kippax Library. While other libraries may remain open on Saturdays, they are not always suitable alternatives due to transport, parking and time constraints.

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

1. Increase investment in ACT libraries so that Civic, Erindale and Kippax Library branches are accessible to the community during weekends;
2. Retain the Giggle and Wiggle Saturday program at Kippax Library.; and
3. Publish and provide detailed library usage figures, including Saturday and Sunday visitation data.

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

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.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (12.06): I want to start my speech by thanking Mr David Still, who is in the chamber with us today. Not only has he been a force of nature campaigning for his local libraries; he has been the most patient man, for waiting two hours until this petition could be tabled. Because we have talked at length about the politics, I want to take some time to talk about the value of our libraries in a positive frame.

Firstly, I am going to talk about “third places”. The concept of third places was first given prominence by American urban sociologist Ray Oldenburg in his 1989 book *The Great Good Place*. He argued that the third places he talks about are vital in safeguarding civil society, civic engagement and democracy itself. I would argue that

they are also vital in promoting lifelong learning, social connection, inclusion and wellbeing. Third places enable people of all ages and backgrounds to participate fully in community life.

What are some examples of third places? Pretty much anywhere that is not work or home—parks, cafes, bars, places of worship, community halls, sportsgrounds and skate parks and, of course, libraries. For young people, third places are where you can hang out and meet new people. For harried parents of young children, they offer some precious opportunities for time out. For anyone who is curious about the world or is keen to gain new experiences, insights and skills, third places can offer stimulation, expanded horizons or simply people-watching. For the elderly, a third place can provide the only human contact in a lonely routine.

In many modern societies, third places are at risk. The only indoor public spaces are within public malls. Nobody walks anywhere because there is nowhere to walk to. Everybody drives because the third place of a bus or a commuter train exists only sparsely or not at all. We are more fortunate with our third spaces here in Canberra, but there is no room for complacency. We need to defend our libraries and the social good that they offer. Through free and low-cost programs, resources and activities, libraries provide safe and welcoming places for children and families, help bridge the digital divide, create connections between people from different cultural backgrounds, reduce social isolation, act as refuges from heat and cold for those who cannot afford a comfortable temperature in their own home and make lifelong learning accessible to all.

The fantastic thing about libraries as vital third places is that they already exist. We do not have to imagine them, invent them or build them. We have them already and we can and should put them to new uses as new needs, ideas and opportunities arise. A quick internet search yields so many examples of the ways libraries all over the world are expanding their offerings—apps, streaming, seeds and tools, story-telling and singing, book clubs and guest speakers.

The whole point of public goods and third spaces is that they should be accessible and expansive, seeking to widen their usefulness, their visibility, their offerings and their support for people with few resources of their own. Our government should be finding and celebrating more ways to use our libraries, not offering less. We should be recognising with practical action the fact that libraries are a great place to offer things that go way beyond borrowing the latest bestseller; that people can gain enormous benefit from their local library even if they have never opened a book; that third places like libraries benefit our community in vital ways that can be very hard to measure; and that even the driest cost-benefit calculation shows the return on investment that libraries give in terms of a healthier, happier and more connected population.

Mr Still's petition calls for three things: increased investment in libraries so that they can expand their hours, not shrink them; publication of data and usage figures, including for weekends; and the retaining of the Saturday morning Wiggle and Giggle at Kippax Library. Those are such modest asks in the scheme of things, and clearly Canberrans felt the same. In fact, over 3,500 Canberrans signed this petition to call on further investment in our local libraries. I would like to thank Mr Still for his advocacy on this issue, and I commend this petition to the Assembly.

Libraries ACT—funding—petitions 65-26 and 86-26

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (12.10): When we first found out that our Kippax branch would be closed all weekend, the first thing I said in here was, “On behalf of West Belconnen, not again.” The government cut the R2 and R3. The government has restored those, and we thank the government for putting those services back. But West Belconnen certainly feel like they are not getting the services that they need to live good lives.

For Giggle and Wiggle, there are over 50 people there on Saturday mornings. Saturday mornings is the busiest time at Kippax. We have been out there on Saturday mornings for the last couple of months. There are so many people using this branch, and people tell me why it matters to them on Saturday mornings—they work all week; they cannot get to the library otherwise. They bring their babies in. It was often two parents coming in with their babies. This was the time when the entire family could enjoy a family outing at the Kippax library.

We have one constituent who is blind. He finds it extremely difficult to get to the Belconnen library. The steps are very narrow and steep. There are poor line markings there. Kippax is the accessible branch. We have people there with disabilities and mobility issues, people walking with mobility aids and sticks, who find Kippax really easy to get into. They can park close by and the ramp is easy. Belconnen is extremely hard to access if you have disabilities. There were a lot of people for whom English was a second language who really valued coming in and having that family outing with Giggle and Wiggle at Kippax library. That is such an important service for so many people, and we hope that the government will be able to reopen that in future.

Libraries ACT—funding—petitions 65-26 and 86-26

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (12.12): Very quickly—because we obviously traversed the libraries issue this morning very thoroughly—I want to acknowledge Mr Still again for being here, as I did earlier. I am not quite sure he anticipated being here for over two hours, but I hope it does not discourage him or other members of our community from coming to this place and participating in Assembly business.

As has been touched on, certainly the Kippax library has been most seriously affected by these closures. Again, I want to thank the community for letting their voice be known and for members of this place for making themselves available, and in this case, Mr Braddock—thank you for doing that, for a petition that was, I believe, kind of consequent and perhaps a partner of the motion that I brought in June, which was supported with Greens amendments, to ask the government to reconsider these closures. It is great to see the community getting behind MLAs who can find a voice for them in this place. I certainly commend this petition for the government’s consideration.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

**Avian influenza—H1N5 virus
Ministerial statement**

MS ORR (Yerrabi—Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water, Minister for Disability, Autism and Neurodiversity, Minister for Housing and Homelessness, and Minister for Equality) (12.14): In the interests of time, I table my ministerial statement:

H5N1 Avian Influenza—Ministerial statement, 16 September 2026—

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Order of business

Ordered that executive business notice of motion No 3 relating to a bill for an Act to amend legislation about housing and consumer affairs, be postponed until the next day of sitting.

Legal Affairs—Standing Committee Scrutiny report 21

MS BARRY (Ginninderra) (12.15): I present the following report:

Legal Affairs—Standing Committee (Legislative Scrutiny Role)—Scrutiny Report 21, dated 8 September 2026, together with extracts of the relevant minutes of proceedings.

I seek leave to make a brief statement.

Leave granted.

MS BARRY: Scrutiny report 21 contains the committee’s comments on seven bills, six pieces of subordinate legislation, proposed amendments to two bills, and four government responses. The report was circulated to members when the Assembly was not sitting. I commend the report to the Assembly.

Administration and Procedure—Standing Committee Report 4

(Quorum formed.)

MR HANSON (Murrumbidgee) (12.18): I present the following report:

Administration and Procedure—Standing Committee—Report 4—Report on the Conduct of Ms Barry MLA, dated 25 August 2026, together with extracts of the relevant minutes of proceedings.

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

That the report be adopted.

Economics, Industry and Recreation—Standing Committee Report 4

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (12.20): On behalf of the chair of the committee, I present the following report:

Economics, Industry and Recreation—Standing Committee—Report 4—Inquiry into barriers and opportunities for participation in community sports in the ACT, dated 5 August 2026, together with extracts of the relevant minutes of proceedings.

I move:

That the report be noted.

I welcome the findings of the inquiry into barriers and opportunities for participation in community sport in the ACT and thank the committee and the many community organisations, volunteers and sporting clubs that contributed to this important work. At its heart, this report is about more than sport; it is about community connection, health and wellbeing and how we create places where people want to spend time with each other.

The committee found that recreation facilities should not be planned in isolation; they should be located where people already live, work and gather, with access to public transport, walking and cycling networks and integrated inter-community activity centres. The report recommends clear criteria for determining the location of future recreation infrastructure, including consideration of public transport access, street activation and equitable geographic distribution. I strongly support this approach. As Canberra becomes a more compact city, our town centres need to be more than places for housing, offices and shopping; they need to become genuine community hubs that support social connection, physical activity and community wellbeing.

The report also recognises that, while school facilities play an important role and should be better utilised, they are not a substitute for dedicated community recreation facilities. Purpose-built facilities provide reliable year-round access, support competitions and events, create a permanent home for clubs and strengthen community connections.

Importantly recommendation 1 calls for a new 10-year sports and recreation strategy supported by a long-term infrastructure pipeline. Good infrastructure starts with good planning. Getting the right facilities in the right places does not happen by accident; it requires a long-term vision, an understanding of how communities will grow and the discipline to reserve land before it is lost to other uses. Planning is needed before social infrastructure is determined by the private sector who have their own interest. This is why planning matters. It is how we create the right mix of facilities in the right locations to create the right vibe. It is how we attract people into our town centres during the day and at night and create safe environments. It is how we build places where people participate, connect and belong.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (12.23): I want to speak briefly to the committee report. It is an important inquiry. I thank my fellow committee members for their work on the inquiry, as well as the incredible Committee Support staff and all of the witnesses that provided feedback.

Community sports and the infrastructure that enables them are vital to community cohesion, wellbeing and health. They provide a place for social connection and genuine community-building, and this was on display over the weekend at the Reclink Community Cup, which was a lot of fun. I acknowledge Mr Steel for participating, Ms Barry for running the water, and Mr Parton for coming along as a spectator—sorry if I have missed anyone—and also, of course, Hannah and Frankie from my office, who joined in the fun. Reclink Australia’s mission is to enhance the lives of individuals experiencing disadvantage through sports, social and arts activities, and I think that is a mission that this Assembly and the ACT government should get behind as much as possible.

Some research from 2018 from KPMG showed that participation and physical activity facilitated by community sport infrastructure provided a health saving of around half a billion dollars annually, so, with inflation and also the increasing burden on our health system, I imagine those figures will have increased significantly since then. It is clear that community support has wide-reaching cross-portfolio benefits for governments and, of course, more importantly, for our community. This is one of the areas where we talk about upstream investment, and we really need to look outside of the health portfolio regarding how we can address challenges in that space.

It can be difficult to build a health system that can deal with 50 per cent of the population having a chronic health condition, and 25 per cent of the population here in the ACT suffers from a mental health condition. These figures are going to be difficult to manage with the health system. That is why we need to be more strategic and diligent in investing upstream, in areas like community sport, to reduce that burden downstream and address chronic health issues before they get out of control, and we need to target the mental health challenges that we are seeing in our community.

As our city continues to densify, it is more important than ever to ensure that, as we get more homes, we are getting them in return for better neighbourhoods, not instead of them, and that includes making sure sporting facilities are being provided to match the growth of our population. We have seen multiple examples—and we are seeing it topical again this week—where private sector provision of sport and recreation infrastructure is not sufficient. We need the ACT government to really step up and meet its local government responsibilities in this area.

We can talk about pools, for instance. The ACT has seven public pools, none of which are free to use. Meanwhile, Wollongong has nine public pools, six of which are free to use, plus nine free-to-use public ocean pools, plus the ocean. The ACT has a population of almost 500,000 residents, compared to the City of Wollongong’s 200,000 residents. The City of Wollongong manages all of those pools. Why aren’t we able to provide a similar level of amenity for our community? We have no government-owned and dedicated indoor sports facilities in the ACT, as Ms Carrick often reminds us and rightly so. My office’s analysis of four local government areas in Melbourne found that, on average, there was one government owned indoor sport and recreation court for every

28,000 people. That does not include the privately owned facilities or the school facilities. The ACT has none. We would need 16 to match the level provided by Melbourne local councils.

Despite all of this, we still do not have the 10-year community sport infrastructure plan or a community sport peak body, which are both things that local sporting organisations have been calling for for years. I am really pleased that that has been picked up in this report, with some strong and clear recommendations about the importance of these measures. Community sporting organisations and the contributions they make to sport across the ACT have been long overlooked. The report proposes strong recommendations that, if responded to appropriately by the government—and, with a new minister in the role, I really hope they will be—should bring about investment in sport at a level commensurate to its value to our community.

I hope this report from the committee will be considered closely and taken seriously. It provides important opportunities to address what is such a critical issue for people in the ACT.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Environment and Planning—Standing Committee Report 8

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (12.28): I present the following report:

Environment and Planning—Standing Committee—Report 8—*Inquiry into the Planning (Missing Middle Housing) Amendment Bill 2026*, dated 22 June 2026, together with extracts of the relevant minutes of proceedings—

I move:

That the report be noted.

I table the Standing Committee on Environment and Planning’s report on the inquiry into the Planning (Missing Middle Housing) Amendment Bill 2026. This is the committee’s eighth report for the Eleventh Assembly. The Planning (Missing Middle Housing) Amendment Bill was presented in the Assembly on 24 March 2026 and the committee decided to inquire into the bill on 2 April 2026. The committee received five submissions. A public hearing was held on 19 May 2026.

The bill was referred to the committee during its inquiry into draft major plan amendment 04—missing middle housing reform. The committee found that the simplified pathways and shortened application timeframes proposed in the bill will encourage developers, individuals and families to take up the densification opportunities that the missing middle reforms offer. The committee makes four recommendations, including that the Assembly pass the bill subject to amendments proposed in the inquiry report.

I thank everyone who contributed to the inquiry and thank the other members of the committee at the time of the inquiry: Ms Fiona Carrick MLA, Mr Peter Cain MLA and

Ms Caitlin Tough MLA.

I commend the report to the Assembly

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Report 9

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (12.30): I present the following report:

Environment and Planning—Standing Committee—Report 9—*Inquiry into DPA-07: Former Braddon Bowls Club*, dated 10 September 2026, together with extracts of the relevant minutes of proceedings—

I move:

That the report be noted.

I table the Standing Committee on Environment and Planning's report on the inquiry into draft major plan amendment to the Territory Plan 07—former Braddon Bowls Club. This is the committee's ninth report for the Eleventh Assembly. DPA-07 was referred to the committee on 12 March 2026, and the committee decided to adopt an inquiry on 2 April 2026. The committee's report was released on 11 September 2026 and a government response is due within four months. The committee received 26 submissions to this inquiry and held one public hearing, in June 2026.

The committee's report recommends that the Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development withdraw DPA-07 for the reasons discussed in the report. In addition, the report recommends that the ACT government consider constructing a suitable crossing on Elder Street to connect the pedestrian and cycling path with Ainslie School.

On behalf of the committee, I thank everyone who participated in the inquiry and took the time to write submissions and appear at our public hearing. The committee thanks petitioners of E-Petition 044-26—protect the former Braddon Bowls Club site—and acknowledges the high community interest in the issue, with 649 people signing that petition. I acknowledge the valuable contribution of all committee members throughout this inquiry, as well as the support provided by our committee secretariat, who managed to get this report out under busy circumstances and with some illness on the secretariat. They worked very hard, and we thank them for meeting the deadline.

I commend the report to the Assembly.

MS VASSAROTTI (Kurrajong) (12.32): I rise to speak briefly to this report. In the last sitting period, I spoke in support of a petition that community members brought to this place. It followed the coming together of the community—teachers, public servants and local North Canberra residents—who rallied at the historic Braddon Bowls Club to stand up in opposition to yet another corporate developer pulling rank on their neighbourhood. I expect the community will be very relieved to hear the outcome of this inquiry and the recommendations of the committee.

At the inquiry hearing and in submissions, community members outlined their frustrations and concerns. They noted the challenges in dealing with a developer with deep pockets that aimed to wear the local community down, and a system that seems to prioritise corporate profits over people and private developers over public good. As we have noted before, we support smart, sustainable infill development, but sustainable development does not mean taking a sledgehammer to our suburbs or green-lighting development that makes no effort to take into account the streetscapes around it or the communities who will be there long after the developers have moved on. We need to see development that is of a scale and nature that fits the suburb and responds appropriately to community facilities, including schools and, in this case, the historic tennis court.

The petitioning and submissions of the community seem to have had an impact, which is really pleasing, as well as community members appearing before the committee. This is a win for the community. They have been fighting for many years to ensure that any development in this area is consistent with the character of the area and does not undermine other community facilities. I particularly recognise the work that has been put into responding to the inquiry.

We urge the minister to respond to the recommendations, we urge the developer to work in good faith with the community, and, finally, we urge everyone to move to a planning system that actually plans rather than continues to subject us to these exhausting block-by-block battles and spot rezonings. This decision also sends a message to proponents of the government that the benefits really need to be well thought out; they need to demonstrate a community benefit.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Standing orders—suspension

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

That so much of the standing orders be suspended as would prevent Assembly business and committee business scheduled for today being called on at a later hour this day.

Sitting suspended from 12.36 to 2 pm

Questions without notice

Fuel—fuel price monitoring

MR PARTON: My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, Canberrans are again paying the highest fuel prices in the country, with unleaded prices averaging 20c per litre more than in petrol stations over the border in Queanbeyan. In your response to the 2019 Select Committee on Fuel Pricing, you acknowledged that greater scrutiny helps drive prices down and agreed that the Independent Competition and Regulatory Commission was the appropriate body to monitor the market. Chief Minister, why, seven years later, has your government still failed to establish ongoing ICRC fuel price monitoring? More to the point, why are we paying so much more?

MR BARR: We are paying more for fuel because of issues beyond our control—principally, actions in the Middle East that are not of our doing. In relation to fuel price monitoring, there is extensive fuel price monitoring undertaken both by the ACCC and by third-party apps. We have a partnership with the New South Wales government which provides, through the Fuel Watch app, real-time reporting in relation to fuel prices.

The Canberra market is different from other parts of Australia because there is less independent retail petrol competition in the territory. That is a reflection of a number of factors. It does include our planning system and where petrol stations are located. A factor that is working to our advantage is that demand for fossil fuels for vehicle travel continues to fall each and every day, as Canberrans embrace alternative zero-emission transport options. Again, a reflection of how much the market is shifting is that registrations in recent months of fully-zero-emission vehicles, plug-in hybrid or hybrid vehicles have outsold petrol and diesel models for the first time. This has now been a consistent trend. It is not surprising, given where fuel prices are, but it does reflect a reality that the electricity that powers zero-emission vehicles does not have to travel through the Strait of Hormuz in order to get here. It is significantly cheaper. We do welcome both the volume and significant price reductions that are coming from EVs.

MR PARTON: Chief Minister, did you ever direct or request the ICRC to undertake the role that was flagged by that committee? If so, on what date and with what terms of reference?

MR BARR: We did commission various ICRC investigative processes, from memory. I cannot recall the exact dates of those. It would go back to my time as Treasurer. The date range was when I was Treasurer, so it was not in the last few years. The government sought to work constructively with the other states and territories and the commonwealth in relation to fuel excise reductions during periods of extremely high petrol and diesel prices, and we have done that more recently.

The ACCC is the national competition monitor, and it is the one that has the far-reaching powers in relation to petrol price gouging. We do have more information as a result of having the Fuel Watch app and the partnership with the New South Wales government. I would hope that, collectively, efforts will be made at a global level to address the issues that are creating the supply shortage in oil, which is, of course, flowing through into petrol prices in Australia. Perhaps the most significant thing that can be done, for those who can afford to, is to purchase a zero-emission vehicle. It means that you are no longer contributing to the demand for expensive fossil fuels.

MR COCKS: Chief Minister, for how many more years will Canberrans have to keep paying the nation's highest prices for fuel?

MR BARR: I hope that, over time, Canberrans will not have to pay any price for fuel and will move to fully electrified transportation. But I recognise that will not happen in the near term. In the near term, we do need—

Mr Parton interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Mr Parton.

MR BARR: We are of the view that the long-term solution to this is that our private transportation is electrified. In the near term, though, we recognise that it will be important not only to maintain continuity of supply through the arrangements that national cabinet has supported but also to ensure that there is a high level of consumer awareness in relation to the cost of each fuel type at each outlet.

We do note, of course, that the global oil price is the most significant factor and that, no matter what the retail margin is, when the terminal gate price into Australia is well over \$2 a litre, and often up to \$2.15 or \$2.20 a litre, retailers are not going to be able to sell below that point, and there will, of course, need to be some retail margin. That ACT retail margins can appear higher at times is also a reflection of the low volume of fuel that is sold in the ACT compared to some other parts of Australia.

Government procurement—conduct in procurement—Campbell Primary School

MS LEE: My question is to the Minister for Education. Minister, during question time yesterday, you said:

I would note that the commissioner can only continue to investigate in relation to matters of current public servants, and not all the people that may have been named in the Operation Kingfisher report potentially for some further investigation are still employed by the Education Directorate.

You went on to confirm that a number of staff who were named in the Kingfisher report had in fact resigned since the release of the report. Minister, how many Education Directorate staff have resigned since the report's release—I am not asking for names—and what were their classification levels?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I will take the question on notice and see what information I can provide. I would note that the resignation period that Ms Lee has indicated is quite specific, in terms of being since the report was released. I would also note in taking the question on notice that providing classification level will, by definition, potentially identify individuals, so I will need to take some advice on whether that information can be provided. I would also note that the fact that an individual has resigned should not be, in any way, taken as an imputation of wrongdoing or that they have resigned in order to avoid any scrutiny. There may be other reasons for resignation. I certainly do not want to lean into imputing any allegations against any individual.

MS LEE: Minister, you may also take this on notice, then. Can you please confirm on notice, for the employees and their classifications, what separation payment or financial settlement they may or may not have received beyond their ordinary entitlements?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I will take that on notice.

MRS MORRIS: Minister, can you guarantee that no employee identified in the findings of Operation Kingfisher was permitted to resign with additional financial benefits rather than being subject to appropriate accountability processes?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I will take the detail of the question on notice, but I would again remind those opposite that ministers play no role in the employment arrangements of public servants. That is a matter for the public service and, in this case, for potentially the director-general or Head of Service.

Government procurement—conduct in procurement—Campbell Primary School

MS LEE: My question is to the Minister for Education. Minister, during question time yesterday in response to a question following on from the Operation Kingfisher report, you said:

I have had a brief conversation with the Director-General of the Education Directorate, to be assured that the Education Directorate itself had undertaken a response to identifying any staff that may be subject to further investigation or consideration, following the release of the Operation Kingfisher report ...

Minister, when was this discussion and what was part of this discussion?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: It was very early on in my tenure. I think it was probably in my first meeting with the director-general. I will take on notice to get the exact date of that meeting. I am not sure that I made a record in any specific detail of the conversation. But, again, I will take the question on notice and I will come back with any information that I can provide to the Assembly and Ms Lee.

MS LEE: Minister, beyond this brief discussion, what specific steps have you personally taken, as the responsible minister, to verify that accountability processes are underway and that no individual identified in the report has avoided proper scrutiny?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I would again emphasise that I do not have ministerial responsibility for the Public Sector Standards Commissioner and I do not have any responsibility in relation to the employment of individual staff in the ACT public service. These are properly matters for directors-general, the Head of Service and, to the extent that it is relevant, the Public Sector Standards Commissioner.

Mr Cain interjecting—

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I have conversations with the director-general to ensure that appropriate processes are being followed; however, it is not for ministers to direct those processes. I would also note that it has been some years since the events that were covered in Operation Kingfisher took place.

Mr Cain interjecting—

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: We are well aware that a number of individuals have left the employment of the ACT public service and some of those individuals are not in the employ of the Education Directorate.

MR CAIN: Minister, if all you have done is have a brief conversation with the director-general, how can Canberrans have confidence that you are exercising ministerial

oversight rather than simply taking the directorate's word for it?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I think I have been very clear about what the role of ministers is in this regard. When I come back in relation to—

Mr Cain interjecting—

Mr Steel: Point of order, Mr Speaker, on the constant interruption from Mr Cain throughout this answer and the previous answer to the questions. I ask that you hold him to account.

MR SPEAKER: I think the minister has raised a reasonable point of order, Mr Cain, and I ask that you remain silent. I want to listen to the minister's answer.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I do have faith in the Director-General of the Education Directorate, and I will continue to have conversations with her about how she is managing the directorate and any risks that she sees in the directorate, including in relation to staffing matters. If those opposite have further concerns when they receive my responses to questions on notice, they of course also have the capacity to refer matters to appropriate authorities or they can ask further questions. The assumption that Mr Cain seems to be making—that somehow there is more I could be doing, even though I have not actually responded in detail to the question on notice at this point—is not an assumption that is supported by any evidence.

Public schools—funding

MISS NUTTALL: My question is to the Minister for Education. Minister, yesterday you referred to the exception process for colleges facing budget cuts and the collective funding pool, which the directorate is meant to draw from to assist college principals to access in cases where cuts are not considered viable. We have heard quite a different story from college principals, who have told us they do not feel supported and are facing impossible decisions on what must be cut from student and staff experience because of their reduced budgets. Can you please advise the Assembly what red line has been drawn for college funding cuts to be considered not viable and for the government to dip into the \$8 million collective funding pool? And how many college principals have accessed this collective funding pool?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Miss Nuttall for the question and for her ongoing interest in this matter. We would be very happy to provide a further briefing to Miss Nuttall on the school budgets approach should she or other members of the Legislative Assembly be interested in that.

In relation to how many have already accessed the exceptions pool, that would be none because those conversations are still ongoing. This is going to be and was always going to be an iterative process between the directorate and individual schools and principals about what their budget and staffing looked like for 2027. That is why the \$8 million exceptions pools was established, because it was clear to the Education Directorate and to me as the incoming minister that simply applying the student resourcing allocation mechanism, as recommended in the school resourcing review, which was supported in this place and which indeed the ACT Greens had called on ACT Labor to support every

recommendation of—but we knew that implementing every recommendation would have some impacts that would not be tolerable for schools or for communities and would not necessarily be sustainable or in the best interests of our students, teachers and school leaders. That is why there is an iterative process.

Again I want to recognise, despite the fact that there has been a conversation on matters of principle, that some school leaders have been surprised in relation to the individual budgets and that these further conversations are ongoing. I want to thank the principals for their close engagement in this process.

MISS NUTTALL: Minister, what does that iterative process actually entail given principals are saying they have not been supported with these cuts?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: It is very early days in this process. I can just outline that from July there has been a principles-based conversation about what do the recommendations of the school resourcing review mean, what does an adjustment-based resourcing model for students with disability and additional learning needs mean and what does getting back to the student resource allocation mean for individual schools. I understand that a number of principals had done their own work to understand what that was likely to mean for their schools. I really thank all of the principals who have done significant work in thinking about the implications of the recommendations.

I also recognise, as I did in response to the first question, that some of the application of those principles have resulted in a challenging budget situation for a number of schools. That was only a short time ago. What the Education Directorate then asked principals to do was to come back, and it said, “How close can you get to budgeting at that amount?” and, “We will look at that and consider through the exceptions process how we can support you.” But financial support is not the only support. There is a process of principals having access to support from the Education Directorate to manage through a range of issues. I would strongly encourage all principals to talk to their education leaders within the directorate and school improvement teams to access that support, not only around their budgets but more broadly around the decision-making.

MS CLAY: Minister, can you guarantee no ACT college will be forced to reduce subject offerings, student support programs or staffing as a result of these budget reductions? And if not, how can you continue to claim these cuts are manageable?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I reject the description of these as “cuts”. The ACT government is increasing funding to public schools through this budget, and we are following the recommendations of the school resourcing review, recommendations that the ACT Greens explicitly asked ACT Labor through our negotiations—and I am going to say this—to implement every recommendation of the school resourcing review, including the recommendation that says:

School staffing currently above the Student Resource Allocation (SRA) should be redeployed to schools based on identified needs and equity principles, or to support system-wide strategic priorities. In the short- to medium-term, the overall allocation should be corrected so that staffing levels are consistent with funding available for school staff within each school and across the system under the SRA.

This recommendation goes on to say:

A senior executive within the human resources area should have responsibility for allocation and redistribution of staff.

That is not how this process is working. There is a collaborative process between schools and the Education Directorate, but the ACT Greens cannot have it every which way. They cannot say we need to be more responsible and deliver better equity of funding across our schools and every time a decision gets hard then turn around and say, “Can you guarantee that there will be no consequences from making hard decisions?” That is not how government works.

Government—supply and confidence

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, given the announcement by the ACT Greens today, how will the government pass the budget?

MR BARR: Well, I guess the logical answer to that question—thank you, Ms Castley—is that we will endeavour to find, amongst the crossbench, three votes beyond our 10.

Although, to be fair to the Greens, the announcement they have just made—I do not want to verbal them, here—is not an indication of their intention to vote against the budget. Ms Clay and I had a discussion before she made her announcement on behalf of the Greens, and we will continue to engage on budget matters—both this current one and future budgets—and we intend to continue to meet ahead of each Assembly sitting in order to have an understanding of each party’s respective approach to matters before the Assembly.

So, from the government’s perspective, we recognise the importance of the appropriation bills, and we certainly strongly encourage those on the crossbench to support them when they come to a vote towards the end of next week.

MR SPEAKER: Ms Castley, a supplementary?

Ms Castley: That is it, thank you.

MR PARTON: A supplementary.. Chief Minister, are you confident in your ability to remain sitting in that chair in this chamber for the rest of the term—if indeed that is your preferred pathway?

MR BARR: Mr Parton is in fact inviting me to make an announcement of government policy, perhaps, Mr Speaker! But in all seriousness, we will continue to engage with the Assembly in good faith on budget matters and others. Each piece of legislation, each motion before the Assembly, will be considered on its merits by each party. The government has 10 votes, and we will obviously need to form partnerships, alliances and perhaps the occasional strategic engagement with the opposition, Mr Parton, on particular matters. And, to the extent that this place will see more diverse voting patterns, potentially, is a reality of the situation. But I think, in fairness, much of that change has already occurred from the beginning of this parliamentary term, when the

Greens political party determined to sit on the crossbench rather than being part of government.

Mrs Morris: A second supplementary?

MR SPEAKER: I am looking at standing order 113B, because I thought you might try this.

Immediately following the answer to a question, one supplementary question may be asked by the Member who asked the original question: provided that the supplementary question is relevant to the original question or arises out of the answer given, contains no preamble, introduces no new matter and is put in precise and direct terms. The Speaker may allow one further supplementary question from other non-Executive Members, provided that the questions are relevant to the original question or the answers given.

So, I think because Ms Castley did not take her supplementary, it does not mean that then rolls on to someone else. Mr Parton, in effect, asked that third question. So, in this case, I will not be taking a supplementary. We will move to a new question.

Avian influenza—H1N5 virus

MS CLAY: My question is to the Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water. Minister, noting your update on bird flu this morning, I have been contacted by a lot of people in our community who are concerned about the impacts that bird flu is going to have on our local wildlife and our native species. We only have around 150 gang-gang cockatoos left, and this could be devastating.

The commonwealth government has committed \$113 million to national bird flu preparedness. The ACT received just 0.3 per cent of that—around \$345,000, in federal funding for site and species planning, habitat protection and wildlife facility biosecurity.

I have looked at the national website and the ACT website this morning and they do have some circular links that just refer back to each other. Between the various websites, people are instructed to call the national hotline, fill out a New South Wales government smart form, email ACT Biosecurity, or call Access Canberra. Further complicating it, ACT and New South Wales share a call centre and community members who have called the national hotline report that they were diverted to New South Wales, with no local knowledge of the ACT, and are being instead told to contact their local council, which we do not have.

Despite your simple slogan “Avoid, Record, Report”, it is in fact very confusing for someone to know how to report. Why doesn’t the ACT have a dedicated local line where there is someone with local knowledge who knows what to do?

MR SPEAKER: Before we take the answer, could I just remind members that rules for questions, under standing order 117 are that questions should be brief. I will allow the question, but I would say that it is pretty borderline, Ms Clay. I remind members that questions should be brief.

MS ORR: I would start by noting the slogan that was attributed to me as my slogan is actually the national advice on what everyone across the country should be doing at this point in time in our response to bird flu. Again, the hotline, I think is the word that we are using, who we call in order to report, is a national hotline. We need to go in there to coordinate because this is an effort that we are coordinating across all governments in Australia and with the commonwealth government.

The scenario that Ms Clay has put forward in her question is the first time I have heard that feedback. I know the City and Environment Directorate has been working quite diligently with our poultry farmers, with our wildlife carers, with our environmental groups and our veterinarian community, as well as across government with our city services and other areas, to make sure that everyone is feeling as prepared as possible, given that it is going to be quite a big task, and an unknown task, because while we have the benefit of what we have seen overseas, it is still unclear how it will play out within our unique wildlife here in Australia. I myself have attended forums that have been held by the City and Environment Directorate with our environmental and community stakeholders who work with wildlife and we have had direct lines of communication open to them, and providing information.

The most important thing that we can convey right now for everyone, and that I ask people to make sure that we are repeating so that there is not confusion, is that we have no detected cases of bird flu here in the ACT that have been confirmed and if you see a sick bird, do not touch—(*Time expired.*)

MS CLAY: Minister noting we raised operational arrangements with your office in a briefing last week, and this matter was under discussion on ABC radio at the start of this week, has anyone in your directorate tested that national hotline to find out whether it actually connects to ACT information?

MS ORR: Mr Speaker, the national hotline provides the nationally consistent information. If I have understood Ms Clay's intent of this question and the last one, it is how do we make sure we are getting localised ACT information? Certainly I can take that away and double check with the directorate.

I would note, however, that the directorate has been working quite diligently, as I outlined in my previous answer, with the local community and what to do, and as we progress through any incursion of bird flu in the ACT, we will continue to provide information on how the community can best respond to anything that we might find ourselves here. But we need to keep our messaging clear and we do not want to overwhelm people.

So again, I would repeat now that my time is not going to run out—the best thing that Canberrans can be doing right now in response to bird flu is if you see a sick bird, do not touch it. Avoid that bird, record what you can see and report it through the hotline. If you have any issues with the hotline, please feel free to reach out to our office or to reach out to Access Canberra. But to the best of the advice to me, I have not had issues with the hotline reported and we have seen reports coming through and tests being done off the back of those reports.

Public schools—screen use and access to generative AI

MR EMERSON: My question is to the Minister for Education. Recognising the growing evidence of harm caused to children's development by excessive screen use, governments around Australia and internationally are taking action to impose limits on screen time in classrooms. New South Wales has just announced daily caps on screen use, starting with a cap of 15 minutes per day for students in kindergarten to year 2, up to a maximum of 50 per cent of lesson time per subject for students in years 11 and 12. Victoria has also announced caps on screen use in schools. Minister, will the ACT government follow suit and place clear limits on screen use in classrooms? If so, when?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mr Emerson for the question. I absolutely recognise that evidence about brain development and the impact of screen time is critical in informing approaches to teaching and learning in our schools. We also know that, beyond the school gates, technology is central to the way that people work and study, and any changes to the ACT public education policy will also reflect the need to prepare students for the future and for the world in which they live. Therefore, it is important to have these conversations with the teaching workforce and with parents and the wider community.

The Education Directorate is currently updating the Acceptable Use of ICT—Parents and Students Policy to reflect the behaviour, responsibilities and expectation of students and parents using ACT government ICT and safe digital environments. Feedback is being sought from staff and stakeholders during September to shape implementation of these changes for the 2027 school year. We will also be looking at what is happening, and are looking at what is happening, in other jurisdictions to understand what their experiences deliver.

Clearly, the use of technology will differ from subject to subject and, as has been recognised by New South Wales, from year group to year group, in terms of the appropriateness of an amount of screen time. We have invested strongly in ensuring that digital access is equitable across our school communities by removing the equity barrier to access to digital devices with the Chromebook program. We do think that we need to find a balance between that very clear evidence—*(Time expired.)*

MR EMERSON: Minister, does the government have any plans to impose any restrictions on the use of AI in public schools, as has been done, for example, in New York City public schools?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Just to finish the last point I was making—a balance between ensuring that children do not have too much screen time and recognising that it is a reality of our digital world.

In relation to AI, the Education Directorate has taken a staged approach to the adoption of AI in schools. This aligns with both national and local policies. Generative AI tools, Google Gemini and Gemini Notebook, which was formerly known as NotebookLM, have been approved for teacher use from term 4 2025. Feedback from teachers indicates that the tools have provided benefits for lesson planning, resource development, supporting diverse learning needs and reducing workload. Now teachers are engaging students in learning about generative AI, including its capabilities, limitations and ethical use, and incorporating AI-related concepts into teacher-led learning contexts.

A curriculum-aligned AI student use trial is planned to occur at several schools in term 4 2026 in one class at each school. That trial will be supervised and will have strong safety, privacy and governance controls, and participation will be limited to students who are aged 13 years and over. Student trials will use Gemini Notebook, as this platform meets necessary safeguards, including robust privacy, safety and commercial data protection requirements. The Gemini Notebook in this trial will only reference the trusted information sources that are provided, allowing educators to tailor curriculum and learning, and reduce access to unverified content.

Again, this is about ensuring that we are working under existing frameworks, including the Australian Framework for Generative AI in Schools, while also helping our students to prepare for the real world in which AI is encountered.

MS CARRICK: Minister, will the ACT government develop and circulate clear guidance materials for all parents on age-appropriate screen and AI use?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I believe that Ms Carrick's question is asking for an announcement of government policy, so I will not respond to that out-of-order question.

Woden town centre—social infrastructure and facilities

MS CARRICK: My question is to the Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development. Minister, the Southern Gateway Planning and Design Framework identifies the need for significant social infrastructure for a sports stadium, an aquatic centre and arts facilities and stated there is limited land available in established areas—for example, Woden town centre. It says that making sure the right social infrastructure in the right locations will help keep the corridor liveable and that providing facilities close to centres and easy for people to reach will help foster vibrant hubs for communities to live, learn, work, socialise and play. The Callam Offices car parks are easy to reach because they are next to the new bus interchange. Buses from across Canberra's south come into the Woden interchange. Minister, why are you selling the car parks around Callam Offices when we need social infrastructure? And what government sites has the government identified and reserved for social facilities in the Woden town centre?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question. I am not personally selling those commercially zoned blocks, but, of course, the government is considering them, as well as the future of Callam Offices themselves, with an opportunity to potentially see the adaptive re-use of Callam Offices. The land surrounding them might provide a potential incentive for someone from the private market to facilitate that re-use, whereas, if they were separated from those car parks, there may not be the same benefits to entice a private market operator to undertake those works, which are considerable on that site. It will require a considerable amount of investment to bring it back into use.

The government has already identified some sites in the Woden area for future community use. We have undertaken planning on the Matilda Street car park site. There is a requirement there for community facilities. There is also the current car park that is being used by Canberra Health Services on the former Woden Valley High School site, which is a community facility zone. That is not planned to be sold off, anticipating that

it will be needed for future community facilities usage, including potentially a school, but also potentially other facilities, like an indoor sports centre, in the future. Proposals have been put forward to the ACT government, which we will need to consider in due course, by private operators like Scentre Group, who have put forward plans to deliver community and recreational facilities on their site within the town centre.

MS CARRICK: Minister, what criteria is the government using to determine whether the private sector proposals for social infrastructure are in the right location and are of the right size to meet the requirements for activation and liveability, as outlined in the Planning Act 2023?

MR STEEL: As we have discussed significantly—through you, Mr Speaker—with Ms Carrick, we are undertaking some work to develop a developer contributions framework, which will then enable the government to consider those kinds of proposals, where there might be, for example, contributed assets or community and recreational facilities that are made available to the public. We will develop that framework first, and that will look at what the benefits are to the community, whether it is in the public interest and whether incentives might be provided to enable those facilities to be built.

I appreciate that Ms Carrick is always focused on location. I have described it as “whereaboutsism”, which is that, wherever the government decides a site should be built on for a particular public project, she disagrees with it and points to a site somewhere else. Obviously, when we make these decisions about where public projects should be built, a lot of due diligence and technical advice goes into determining the best place, depending on the functional needs and technical needs of a particular project. Ms Carrick and I have disagreed a lot over the years. She opposed CIT Woden on the basis that she disagreed with it being on the site of the current interchange. We thought it was a fantastic way to build both a new interchange and a new CIT campus to renew the town centre.

Ms Carrick: Mr Speaker, on a point of order: when did I disagree that it should be on that site? If you could provide that evidence—

MR SPEAKER: That is a debating point. On the point of order, Mr Cocks?

Mr Cocks: On the point of order: I think that what Ms Carrick is trying to get at is that the minister is debating the question.

MR SPEAKER: I think that is where she was going and I would agree with her. I ask you to refrain from debating the question. A supplementary, Mr Emerson?

MR EMERSON: Minister, in these instances, how exactly do you determine the best outcome for the community rather than choose the most convenient outcome for a developer?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. We are currently undertaking the work to develop a framework to look at whether it is in the public interest to consider an arrangement with a developer, where they might contribute to or make available a community or recreational asset. The whole purpose of the framework is to consider proposals that are brought forward from the private sector. Obviously, there needs to

be an agreement between the parties to then facilitate an outcome. Without agreement, there would be no outcome.

Government—supply and confidence

MR PARTON: My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, you are running a government in chaos. Three ministers have been censured this term and your former deputy has resigned over corruption findings from the Integrity Commissioner. Now, like so many Canberrans, the Greens have walked away from your government, with the end of negotiations for a supply and confidence agreement. Do you still have confidence in the members in this chamber that you can somehow hold your government together for another two years?

MR BARR: Yes.

MR PARTON: Chief Minister, how can your leadership survive the departure of your long-term former coalition partners and certainly long-term supply and confidence partners?

MR BARR: I am not aware of any moves against my leadership and, in conversation with Ms Clay this afternoon, that was confirmed.

MRS MORRIS: Chief Minister, how many supply and confidence agreements are currently in effect and with whom? Has your government sought new guarantees of supply from any independent members?

MR BARR: If I assume that Ms Clay's meeting with me and the public announcement signifies—I will get a nod from her; that is a yes. There is one with Mr Emerson—and that is all.

Transport Canberra—advertising on buses and bus shelters

MS VASSAROTTI: My question is to the Minister for Transport and the minister for city services. The ACT government has a policy of prohibiting ads for unhealthy food on public transport. However, members of the public have been seeing these sorts of ads pop up on our buses. Further, in a letter to you we asked why oOh!media have been allowed to display ads for junk food on bus shelters when it is in breach of their contract. In your response, at first you said that eliminating food advertising would render their services uneconomical and therefore unviable and that this therefore poses a potential major maintenance risk and financial burden on the territory. But in a reply we received yesterday to our second letter you said that the City and Environment Directorate expects oOh!media to comply with all contractual requirements and operational arrangements for the remainder of the current contract.

Does this mean that you will no longer allow oOh!media to breach their contract for the sake of their profits? And if so, what will the directorate do to ensure that oOh!media complies with their contractual obligations?

MS CHEYNE: I have not signed any correspondence since I got back, so I suspect at least one of those has been signed in my absence. Without wishing to mislead the

Assembly, I will take it on notice so that I can be as accurate as possible.

MS VASSAROTTI: You might need to take this on notice as well, which would be fine. What corrective action will the directorate undertake to ensure that junk food ads on bus shelters near schools such as Lyneham High and Radford College will be the first ones to be removed?

MS CHEYNE: I will take it on notice.

MR BRADDOCK: How much does advertising contribute to the cost of Transport Canberra operations? And if it is not much, then what exactly is the important service that is being offered by oOh!media?

MS CHEYNE: I will take the exact figure on notice. As I think has been well established globally—and Canberra is no different—public transport is something that is heavily subsidised. Governments across the world, including across Australia, do look for non-fare revenue to assist with those costs. It may be insignificant to some, but given we are looking to ensure we have revenue streams where we can and where it makes sense, those should continue. But I appreciate the tenor of the question, and I will come back to the chamber with some clarification about exactly what is in the contract and what the government's expectations of the advertising company are.

Government procurement—conduct in procurement—Campbell Primary School

MRS MORRIS: My question is to the Chief Minister. Yesterday, when asked whether Manteena had approached you or your office about irregularities in the Campbell Primary School procurement, you replied that you were “many steps removed” from any Education Directorate procurement seven years ago. That procurement has now resulted in findings of serious corrupt conduct involving some of the most senior people in your government. Chief Minister, do you believe that credible warnings of corrupt conduct occurring within your then-Deputy Chief Minister's office are too many steps removed to warrant your attention?

MR BARR: No. I reject the premise of the question, Mr Speaker.

MRS MORRIS: Chief Minister, have you now established whether corruption concerns were ever raised, prior to Operation Kingfisher, with you, your office or a member of your government? Or is it your custom to turn a blind eye to corruption?

MR BARR: No, it is not my custom, Mr Speaker. And, obviously, the public record is quite clear in relation to when information was available and the responses, going all the way back to the Auditor-General's report on the matter.

MR MILLIGAN: Chief Minister, has anyone been held accountable for the failure to act on the warnings of corrupt conduct, or is serious corrupt conduct tolerated by your government?

MR BARR: It is not tolerated, Mr Speaker, and the actions of the integrity agencies that we put in place are there for all to see.

Government procurement—conduct in procurement—review

MRS MORRIS: My question is to the Chief Minister. Yesterday you told the Assembly that following the findings of Operation Kingfisher you directed the commencement of a review, which I understood to be looking into Education Directorate procurement during the period involving the former Director-General and the former ministerial Chief of Staff who were found to have engaged in serious corrupt conduct. Chief Minister, who is conducting this review, what is its scope and what powers does it have?

MR BARR: I asked the acting Head of Service to commence that process.

Mr Cain: Acting Head of Service?

MR BARR: Yes, the Head of Service was on sick leave at the time so I asked the acting Head of Service to undertake that process. We are focusing initially on procurements in the Education Directorate in that time period. There is not many of them, Mr Speaker. So that is the obvious point on which to focus. Of course, the Auditor-General has undertaken various pieces of work over an extended period of time as well. There have been no other referrals that I am aware of in relation to any project at that time, though a further assessment is being undertaken. The entity that is now Infrastructure Canberra, that did not exist at that time obviously, is playing a role as well in providing advice to the central agency.

MRS MORRIS: Chief Minister, how can Canberrans trust this review will actually stamp out corruption from this rotten Labor government?

MR BARR: I will look beyond the hyperbole in the question. We have a number of integrity agencies and oversight agencies, including the Auditor-General and the Integrity Commission. We have fundamentally changed the nature of procurement. We have a new capital framework in place and capital works of any significant scale are now centrally managed through Infrastructure Canberra. So the environment of 2019-20 and how procurement and major projects are undertaken in 2026-27 are very different.

MR PARTON: Chief Minister, have you, or anyone from the government been provided with any meaningful update on the review, or indeed an interim report?

MR BARR: Not at this stage, given I asked for it after the tabling by the Integrity Commission of their findings and that was in late July, we are now only in mid-September.

Electric vehicles—charging infrastructure

MR BRADDOCK: My question is to the Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water. Minister, following the media coverage that has highlighted that Canberrans are still paying some of the highest fuel prices in the country, consumers are voting with their wallet, and electric vehicle sales are at an all-time high in the ACT. Is the ACT government working to ensure that there is enough coverage of available

and useful electric vehicle charging facilities for these new EV owners?

MS ORR: I thank the member for his question. The short answer is yes; the ACT government is working towards how we support the uptake of electric vehicles, particularly through charging infrastructure. We have 228 individual public EV chargers servicing 322 charging bays across 100 sites. Those are there, in a number of instances, with the support of the ACT government. We continue to look at ways that we can put in more charging and different types of chargers—for instance, slower chargers in our park-and-rides and other areas where we could be using a different mix, so that people have options.

We will continue to work through that. We will also continue to work through that with Evoenergy to make sure that we are doing it in such a way that the grid remains stable and so that we can make sure that everybody's energy needs are met.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, is the number of chargers commensurate with the number of EVs now in the ACT vehicle fleet?

MS ORR: I am not sure that I quite understand the member's question and the connection he is drawing there. The chargers that I was talking about are publicly available ones, and they are available for everyone publicly to use them.

MISS NUTTALL: Minister, what is the government doing to ensure renters, apartment owners and other potential EV owners who do not have ready access to trickle charging can still reap the benefits of EV ownership?

MS ORR: To provide support for unit owners to transition to EVs, \$2.2 million was allocated in the 2024-25 budget for the EV-ready apartments loan program, which provides interest-free loans to help install chargers. We have just launched, following the pilot, the permanent program regarding technical advice on how to prepare your multi-unit complex for electrification. That can take in charging infrastructure. Again, while that goes to what individual complexes can do, if they wish to have an individual charger, the government also, as I have already mentioned, continues to invest in our public charging infrastructure, which is available to everyone to use.

I would note that I live in an apartment building and I use the charger at the local shops. It is very convenient. By the time I go and do my Woolies shopping for the week, my car is charged. We will continue to look at ways that we can support the uptake of electric vehicles across all options and in a way that is equitable for all Canberrans to access.

Hospitals—perinatal mental health

MR PARTON: My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, women experiencing perinatal mental illness or distress may require inpatient treatment at a time when they also have a newborn baby requiring care and support. My question relates to the availability of inpatient services for these women—whether mothers can remain with their newborn while receiving treatment, the extent of separation where this is not possible, and whether the government has considered a dedicated mother-and-baby service. Minister, what inpatient mental health services are currently available

in the ACT for women experiencing perinatal or postpartum mental illness who require hospitalisation?

DR PATERSON: I thank the member for the question. We have the Perinatal and Infant Mental Health Consultation Service, which is part of the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service. It currently provides support for people who are planning pregnancy, are pregnant or are mothers of babies under the age of 12 months and have a severe mental health issue which is getting in the way of a warm and safe relationship with their baby. The ACT government and ACT Labor remain committed to improving perinatal mental health services in the ACT and are committed to the establishment of a residential mother-and-baby unit as part of our election commitment. In the 2025-26 budget, \$732,000 was provided to Canberra Health Services to undertake a feasibility study for this residential perinatal mental health unit.

MR PARTON: Minister, could I be clear: as at today, can a mother requiring inpatient care remain in hospital with her newborn baby?

DR PATERSON: I will take that on notice.

MRS MORRIS: Minister, what inquiries or evidence have been considered to inform the decision to separate mothers and their babies?

DR PATERSON: I will take that on notice.

Alexander Maconochie Centre—detainee programs

MS BARRY: My question is to the Minister for Corrections. Last Friday marked 18 years since the Alexander Maconochie Centre was officially opened as a prison intended to place human rights and rehabilitation at the centre of its operations. The 2025 Healthy Prison Review found that detainees still did not have sufficient access to programs, education or work and that this failure was not new and that it was impeding rehabilitation and contributing to drug use and violence.

Minister, will you do what your predecessors failed to do and commit to delivering a structured day of meaningful work, education and rehabilitation at the AMC to better achieve the purpose of sentencing?

MS TOUGH: I thank Ms Barry for the question. It is my first question as a minister in this place. It is a great privilege to be the Minister for Corrections. It is a portfolio that I have put a lot of time into getting my head around. I have been out to see the Alexander Maconochie Centre recently and visited quite a lot of staff in the different parts of Corrections—and I look forward to visiting the Court Transport unit soon—to dive deep into how the Alexander Maconochie Centre works and how the Corrections portfolio as a whole works. It is one part of our justice system but it is a really important part.

People who find themselves in Corrections have been through the whole system—through the police and through courts—to get to that moment, and it is really important that we help them not be part of recidivism. One of the ways that we do that is by delivering a range of education programs and services to support detainees in the AMC, and I thank my predecessors in these portfolios for the work they have started and the

work that I am continuing to undertake.

It is really important that we have Healthy Prison Reviews, so that we know what we need to do. I have had so many conversations with my directorate around how we are delivering programs. We are continuing to explore avenues that provide detainees with access to so many educational programs to meet their needs and deliver skills to support their transition into the community and their employment outcomes. When I was at the AMC recently I met with a number of detainees who are working in different parts of the AMC to develop those skills and I met with staff who are supporting people who are undertaking post-school qualifications. I am proud of the work that we are doing and will continue to do in this portfolio.

MS BARRY: Minister, given that the rates of recidivism are skyrocketing, have you identified what is going so horrifically wrong at the AMC, and what are you proactively doing to clean up drugs in prison?

MS TOUGH: I thank Ms Barry for the supplementary question and for the broad range of issues covered in that question. I want to talk about the work we have done in bringing body scanners into the prison. Recently—and thanks to my predecessor—we introduced body scanners into the AMC and will very soon have one on board at the Court Transport Unit, so that people who are coming into the AMC as detainees are scanned in a way that can help find contraband that has been brought in.

In our Corrections team, we have an amazing team of intelligence officers who know who is coming into the AMC and work really closely with our colleagues to identify people who are visiting the AMC and what they might be bringing in. The intelligence officers work with all the different staff across the justice system to reduce contraband that is being brought into the AMC. Our Corrections staff do an amazing job at identifying and finding contraband within the AMC and removing it and working out how that contraband got in there, so that we can reduce the amount of things going in. People will always find ways of getting things into places where they should not be, but our Corrections staff do a great job in working together with the police to stop contraband coming in. That, combined with many of the criminogenic and wellbeing programs being run in the AMC, is reducing the amount of contraband coming into the AMC.

MR CAIN: Minister, what rate of reoffending do you think is acceptable and how will you ensure that the rate decreases under your watch?

MS TOUGH: Thank you, Mr Cain, for that supplementary. That is an interesting question. I do not think anyone wants to see any reoffending within the community. I think it is really important that places like the AMC work to reduce the rate of reoffending for people who are in there. I think it is a whole-of-community exercise to work amongst the members of our community to stop offending in the first place, that the supports are there for people before they even get into the criminal justice system. It is important to work with people who are in the criminal justice system to identify what supports they need to be rehabilitated, re-enter the community and not reoffend.

It is not an issue purely for Corrections; it is a whole-of-society issue, to work with people so they have the supports they need to not offend in the first place and, if they

do, to be rehabilitated and integrated back into society.

Mr Barr: Mr Speaker, further questions can be placed on the notice paper.

Supplementary answers to questions without notice

Avian influenza—H1N5 virus

MS ORR: In addition to the answers I provided to Ms Clay in response to her question on information and reporting of bird flu, I would like to further clarify that the hotline is a national 24/7 service that anyone can use to report suspected emergency animal diseases. It is not a hotline for everyday animal health issues or for day-to-day information about H5 bird flu. The hotline has trained staff that assess the information provided by the caller, including the signs, location and risk, and decide if further investigation is needed. This can include property visits, sample collection and laboratory testing to rule out any cases or confirm any cases. Where the information provided requires further investigation, the call is referred to ACT Biosecurity. Residents who are seeking information specifically about the ACT are best to refer to ACT Biosecurity or call Access Canberra to be connected. There is also a lot of information on the birdflute.gov.au website.

Libraries ACT—opening hours

MS CHEYNE: In response to a question that I took on notice yesterday from Miss Nuttall about the number of casual staff whose contracts expired on 30 June, I can advise that there were 24 casual staff. However, it is important to note that, given the arrangements were of a casual nature, many of them had not been actively working in libraries in the lead-up to that contract ending. Pleasingly, there were eight casual staff who had indicated that they were interested in ongoing employment who have now received employment on an ongoing basis and so are part of the permanent FTE.

Public housing—maintenance

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

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) the proportion of public housing in the ACT has declined from 12.2 percent in 1989 to 5.5 percent in 2026;
- (b) there were 3,652 approved applicants on the ACT's public housing waitlist on 30 June 2026;
- (c) there were 588 vacant public housing dwellings in the ACT in August 2026, of which 285 required maintenance or upgrades to be tenable;
- (d) properties awaiting maintenance or upgrades remained vacant for an average of 284 days as of June 2026;
- (e) the Productivity Commission's *Report on Government Services 2026* shows the proportion of ACT public housing in acceptable condition has decreased from 76 percent in 2023 to 71 percent in 2025, the second

worst rate in the country;

- (f) Housing ACT's accountability indicator sets a public housing occupancy target of 96 percent, which was not on track to be met in 2025-2026; and
 - (g) despite Programmed being contracted to deliver Housing ACT maintenance, the Government piloted the insourcing of this maintenance for one year from July 2024;
- (2) further notes that:
- (a) this Assembly unanimously agreed that housing is a human right in 2025;
 - (b) Mr Jonny Warren's "20 Homes By Christmas" campaign offers a rapid pathway to enable 20 of the ACT's vacant public housing properties to be occupied by Christmas;
 - (c) this would be achieved through pro bono industry-supplied labour and materials to renovate properties selected by the Government;
 - (d) the donated labour and supplies would satisfy all mandated minimum qualification, insurance, quality and industry standards;
 - (e) ACT Shelter, Housing All Australians and over 200 local tradespeople have indicated their support for the project and volunteered to help;
 - (f) 2024 ACT Australian of the Year and ACT Chair of Housing All Australians, Ms Jo Farrell, has obtained a Secure Local Jobs Code certificate as requested by the Government and will provide project managers for the initiative;
 - (g) Mr Warren hopes the campaign can be piloted and ultimately scaled up to 100 homes next year; and
 - (h) the outpouring of support for this proposal shows there is significant community concern regarding the shortage of public housing available for vulnerable Canberrans and the rise in homelessness across the ACT; and
- (3) calls on the Government to:
- (a) allocate 20 suitable properties for this initiative to commence by the end of September 2026;
 - (b) work with Mr Warren and his team to ensure approvals are processed expeditiously to enable the maintenance and upgrade works to be carried out in time for the properties to be tenanted by 25 December 2026;
 - (c) evaluate the success of the initiative by the end of March 2027 and report back to the Assembly on outcomes from the evaluation by the end of May 2027;
 - (d) commit to reducing the average vacancy time for properties requiring maintenance or upgrades to no greater than 90 days; and
 - (e) revise Housing ACT's accountability indicator for public housing occupancy to at least 98 percent.

There are serious concerns across our community about the number of vacant public housing properties here in the ACT. That number is 588. These are properties owned by the government—effectively by our community—that are not tenanted, that are sitting empty, while the housing crisis here in the ACT grows and exacerbates. We

know that 285 of those properties need maintenance or repairs to be made tenantable. That number, 588, is a lot of homes, and it has increased by more than 50 dwellings in the first half of this year. In the same time, our public housing waitlist increased by more than 150.

I do not understand and a lot of Canberrans—some of whom have joined us in the chamber today—do not understand how it could be that the number of people waiting for public housing has increased while the number of vacant public housing properties has also increased. This is something that we need to address. Canberrans are concerned about the shortage of public housing in the ACT. They have seen the impacts out in our community. They have seen the impacts on streets, in cars and on couches across the ACT, and they have also seen the vacant homes. I am getting inundated with messages like, “You should see this one on my street that has been empty for years,” and “With this one in my complex, it seems that nothing is happening with this property, and I do not understand.” Canberrans are scratching their heads about these vacancy rates.

We are seeing the growing problem of homelessness across our community. A lot of Canberrans who are safely and securely housed and have no concerns otherwise are deeply concerned by the length of the government’s public housing waitlist. They are shocked by the number of publicly-owned homes that are sitting vacant, often for many months or even years at a time, while vulnerable community members who are couch surfing, sleeping rough, sleeping in cars, attempting to escape violence in their own homes or just experiencing extreme housing stress wait desperately for safe and secure housing.

Two months ago, Jonny Warren and Adam Mumford saw the problem and decided they wanted to be part of the solution, launching an initiative to get 20 individuals or families into vacant public housing properties by Christmas. The proposal is very simple: identify and approve 20 vacant properties for renovation, with the industry committing to sourcing—for free—building supplies, tradespeople and project managers to get the homes ready for tenants. Last month I wrote to the Minister for Housing and Homelessness calling on the government to play its part, and that just means allocating 20 suitable properties for Jonny and his team to get to work.

Bizarrely, the ACT government is yet to accept this incredibly generous offer. The government has cited a range of hurdles—fair enough—including probity and even value for money, despite this proposal being free, which is why I have resorted to bringing a motion to the Assembly today calling for the government to get on board. I think it is bizarre to have an offer of such generosity from people in our community and for us to get to the point where I actually feel like I need to get my Assembly colleagues to vote in support of calling on the ACT government to accept free help—help us help you here. Some of the conversations I have had with the campaign team have been fascinating, where they are fighting as hard as they can to let the government help them solve a problem that matters to us as Canberrans and should matter to the government.

The proportion of public housing in the ACT has declined from 12.2 per cent at self-government in 1989 to just 5.5 per cent. While the size of our public housing stock is finally starting to grow again, it basically flatlined for years, while the cost of living and housing prices worsened. The waiting list has ballooned to 3,652 approved

applicants. These are households—so that could be 7,500 people. These are people we know cannot afford housing in the private market.

For the public housing we do have, the Productivity Commission's latest *Report on Government Services* shows that the stock that we have that is in an acceptable condition has decreased from 76 per cent in 2023 to 71 per cent in 2025. That is the second-worst rate in the country. That means almost a third of our public housing dwellings do not have at least four working facilities—things like the shower and the stove—and no more than two major structural defects. One or even two major structural defects is all right. You just cannot have three or more to meet that definition. At the same time, we also have the highest rates of persistent homelessness in the country, which means if you become homeless in the ACT, you are more likely to stay homeless here than you would be in any other state or territory in Australia, while homes that we own, that Canberrans own through their government, sit vacant. In a jurisdiction that celebrates being the most progressive in Australia, this is completely unacceptable.

On top of the human cost, we need to look at the short-sightedness and long-term financial costs of failing to maintain the quality and value of public assets. These are our community's assets, and we all know in our own personal lives that letting our assets fall into disrepair ultimately costs us more in the long run. I asked about this during estimates and was told the reason our public housing stock is in the second-worst condition in the country is because it is aging—we have an aging stock. But when I pushed back and officials acknowledged that everyone's public housing stock is aging—and that is the thing about aging—no explanation was given as to why public housing here in the ACT is in such poor condition.

We know this is a problem for the vacant dwellings, but it is also a problem for the dwellings that are occupied, that are tenanted. The ACT Ombudsman made findings to this effect earlier this year, which have been canvassed multiple times in this chamber, and said that Housing ACT has failed to meet its legal obligations to provide timely maintenance and repairs for public housing tenants in the ACT. One of the tenants identified in that report still had not had their issues resolved three months after the report was handed down. In one of the case studies, that person could not get their issue resolved even after the ACT Ombudsman independently found that Housing ACT was failing in its legal obligations to its tenants.

Canberrans see the housing and homelessness crises our community is facing every day. More and more people are asking, "What is going on here? What happened to the human right to housing"—something that all members of this Assembly voted to support—"Why are our governments struggling to meet the most basic needs of their citizens?" Some are asking, thankfully, "How can I help?" Jonny Warren is a local who wants to help. He has had lived experience of homelessness and addiction. His campaign, "20 Homes by Christmas", offers a rapid pathway to enable some of the ACT's vacant public housing properties to become homes. This would be achieved through pro bono industry-supplied labour and materials to renovate properties selected by the ACT government.

Since Jonny launched this campaign last month, the response has been overwhelming. There has been a lot of effort put in by Jo Farrell at Housing All Australians—an absolute powerhouse—to get all the logistics and everything ready to support this; ACT

Shelter has supported the campaign; and, remarkably, over 200 people have reached out wanting to help. These are tradespeople in large part, including offers from here in Canberra, but also Brisbane, Perth and Melbourne, and that includes from suppliers as well. Just today I had a message from a lawyer who saw some of the commentary regarding the contractual barriers and so on to having this occur, offering legal help to address those barriers and make sure that this actually happens.

Canberrans from all works of life are putting their hands up to help—some of whom have joined us in the gallery today and I thank them for taking the time out. They want to be part of the solution, because they can see that the government is struggling to get this done on its own. It is great to back a generous initiative from Canberrans. The calls are simple—and they are in the motion: identify and approve 20 suitable vacant properties for renovation. While it will not solve the housing crisis, it offers the opportunity to change the lives of 20 households. In Jonny's words:

The idea for 20 Homes by Christmas began during our CEO Sleepwalk to the Vinnies CEO Sleepout. Spending time alongside people experiencing homelessness took me straight back to my own journey, and I found it incredibly emotional. We met a mother and her four-year-old son sleeping in their car because their home was no longer safe due to domestic violence. I could not stop thinking about that little boy trying to sleep in a car with nowhere safe to wake up while his mum did everything she could to protect him.

Then we learned there were 588 vacant public housing properties across the ACT. We are not asking for all of them. We are simply asking for 20 properties to bring together local trades, businesses and supporters, help get those homes ready and give people like that mother and her son somewhere safe to live by Christmas. Behind every vacant house could be a family waiting for a fresh start. We have the people, the resources and the determination to help. We just need the opportunity.

Aside from the 20 households set to be supported by this initiative, the fact that software is being made pro bono also provides an opportunity to free up government resources to do more in tackling the housing crisis elsewhere. Again, Jonny and his team have the labour and the resources. We are not talking about people like me walking around with a hammer and a screwdriver trying to figure out what needs to be done. We are talking about qualified tradespeople who know what they are doing and project managers who know how to manage this sort of work. They just need the government to give the go-ahead so they can get on with it.

There are some other calls in this motion that I want to touch on, because it is not just about this individual campaign but also about some of the systemic issues in the management of our public housing stock. Questions I have asked that were taken on notice have indicated that public housing properties awaiting maintenance or upgrades remained vacant for an average of 284 days as of June 2026. That is why there is a call in this motion to commit to reducing the average vacancy time for properties requiring maintenance or upgrades to no greater than 90 days, which seems pretty reasonable to me.

Housing ACT's existing indicator, its target, for public housing occupancy is 96 per cent—so a four per cent vacancy rate. They were not on track to achieve this last financial year. It was looking like five per cent. So I have a call in this motion to revise

the accountability indicator for public housing occupancy to at least 98 per cent—a maximum vacancy rate of two per cent. Implicit in that call is, of course, to meet the target. We have heard in some of our exchanges with the government about this issue that they have made improvements; they are improving their processes; and there is increased government investment in this area.

Some of the conversations even seemed to go so far as to say there is actually nothing wrong here and there is no problem to solve, which I find hard to believe based on some of the data. But, if that is the case, then I would hope all members would support these calls for some accountability around that. If that is the case and everything is tickety-boo—things are working well, the process is great, government’s investing enough in this area and all the problems we have seen in the past decade will be addressed—fantastic. If we do the 20 homes by Christmas, everyone in the gallery here would be able to get back to their to their normal lives. We are going to hold the government to account on some real targets and make sure that they are meeting those targets and ensuring that the homes that we own as Canberrans are provided to the people who most need them.

With all of that said, I want to acknowledge the constructive engagement my office and I have had with Minister Orr and her office and also government officials who provided us with a briefing to understand some of their concerns around this proposal. It has been encouraging to engage constructively, including on the amendments that Ms Orr has circulated today, which I am comfortable with, to provide some extra context around this. I really hope on the back of this motion today that these people behind me can stop fighting to be allowed to help the government with a problem that matters to Canberrans but can be welcomed in.

That is part of the reason that I wanted to support this initiative however or I could, because governments can work more closely with the communities that they represent; governments can engage with industry; and, it turns out, Canberrans have huge hearts and they are willing to be part of solutions to the problems that we face. Sometimes that requires innovating; it requires moving quickly; it requires adapting to existing processes; and, above all, it requires saying “yes”. This is an incredibly generous offer. The answer should be “yes”—from day one: “Yes, we are going to do this and we are going to figure out how to do this, and here is our proposal for how you can help us.” That is the approach that I think the team behind this campaign have really hoped for and yearned for from the government.

It is something I think Canberrans and Australians more broadly want from their governments. They want to feel like, “My government is a partner in solving the problems that we face and is responsive to the things that we are putting forward as a community.” There is an opportunity here to show that public sector values like innovation are not just words on a page but are actually things that the government is willing to uphold and commit to and that, when everyday people put up their hands and say, “We want to be part of the solution,” the government goes, “Great; we do too. Let’s work on it together.”

With all of that said, I commend my motion to the Assembly. During the debate later on, I will touch on some of the amendments that have been circulated.

MS ORR (Yerrabi—Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water, Minister for Disability, Autism and Neurodiversity, Minister for Housing and Homelessness, and Minister for Equality) (3.20): I rise today to speak to Mr Emerson’s motion calling on the ACT government to facilitate the 20 Homes by Christmas initiative, being spearheaded by Mr Jonny Warren and a group of passionate volunteers.

I want to thank the 20 Homes by Christmas organisers for their offer. Their willingness to contribute their time, skills and effort reflects the strong community spirit that exists across the ACT.

Mr Speaker, I will flag that I will be moving an amendment which has been circulated in my name. And the amendment largely provides additional information on vacancy figures and turnaround time for repairs and maintenance of public housing properties, and also adds some additional wording to the calls-on section of the motion, to reflect the obligations government is required to meet in considering or facilitating the proposal.

It is important to understand what vacancy figures actually represent. Public discussion often focuses on the number of vacant properties at a particular point in time—and that is understandable. When people are waiting for housing, any vacant property attracts attention. And when vacancy figures appear relatively unchanged over time, it can create the impression that little is happening and that homes are sitting idle. However, homes continually move through this system, and the composition of vacancy figures can change from day to day—meaning a single headline figure does not capture the level of activity occurring. For example, so far in this financial year, more than 150 homes have become vacant; more than 150 homes have completed repairs and maintenance work; and more than 150 homes have been allocated. In other words, not all the properties that were vacant at the start of July are the same properties that are vacant today.

I acknowledge the public housing occupancy rate is currently below the accountability indicator, and I share the community’s expectation that every effort should be made to minimise vacancies and make homes available to people in need, as quickly as possible. This is precisely why the ACT government has invested additional funding in repairs and maintenance, and is committed to ensuring vacant properties are safely repaired, upgraded and returned to stock in a coordinated and sustainable way.

The 2025-26 budget review included \$15.4 million for an increased program of essential repairs and maintenance work, with a particular focus on returning vacant properties to the portfolio more quickly. The investment supported 858 vacant properties being returned to a lettable standard and made available for allocation in the 2025-26 financial year, with 129 of these being completed in June 2026 alone. All of these properties were being returned ready for allocation in relatively short timeframes.

For properties that needed only routine minor works, the average turnaround time across the financial year was 11 days, reducing to an average of eight days in the last quarter. Even where more substantial work was required, properties needing moderate upgrades were being returned in an average of 28 days, and those requiring larger upgrades were completed in an average of 58 days. These results demonstrate that

vacant properties are being returned in a timely, efficient and systemic way.

And, Mr Speaker, it is important to recognise that some vacant houses will never return to the pool of properties available for allocation. At 30 June 2026, 43 properties had been identified for sale, redevelopment or other strategic asset management purposes.

While these properties have reached the end of their useful life as public housing, they continue to play an important role in strengthening public housing. Where properties are sold, the proceeds are reinvested into growing and renewing the portfolio. And where they are redeveloped, they are replaced with modern, fit-for-purpose homes that, in many cases, increase the overall supply of public housing. These decisions are part of the long-term stewardship of the portfolio to ensure it meets the needs of current and future tenants.

The ACT government is also acquiring and constructing new homes, and at times these properties are captured within vacancy figures before they are ready for allocation. At 30 June 2026, there were 15 such properties captured in the vacancy figures. In these cases, Housing ACT has established the administrative records for the dwellings, but settlement had not yet occurred or the property had not yet been formally handed over to Housing ACT. This work is undertaken in advance to minimise delays and ensure homes can be allocated as quickly as possible once Housing ACT takes possession.

It is also important to understand that returning a property to a lettable standard is not the final step of the process covered by the vacancy rate measure. Housing ACT must identify a household for whom the property is suitable. Allocation is not simply a matter of matching the next vacant property with the next applicant on the housing register. Housing ACT must consider factors such as household size, accessibility requirements, support needs, safety considerations and connections to family, community and services. The goal is not simply to allocate a property, but to allocate the right property to support a successful and sustainable tenancy that reflects the household's needs and circumstances.

I hope this detail demonstrates why vacancy figures require careful interpretation and why a vacant property should not automatically be assumed to be awaiting maintenance and repairs, or available for immediate allocation.

With that said, I do wish to be clear that the detail I have provided does not diminish the importance of further reducing vacancy periods wherever possible, or the overall number of vacant properties. It simply highlights the need to understand what vacancy figures are actually measuring.

Looking forward, in addition to the past funding increases in previous budgets, the 2026-27 budget includes \$183.4 million in new funding over four years to further address longstanding pressures in public housing repairs and maintenance. In 2026-27, this brings the total funding envelope for repairs and maintenance to nearly \$100 million, with a key priority being the faster turnaround of vacant properties. This focus will help reduce vacancy periods, maximise the use of existing public housing stock and, most importantly, get more people into homes sooner.

Mr Speaker, I also wish to acknowledge that the ACT government has a duty to protect

both the people who live in public housing and those who undertake work on public assets, which requires appropriate risk management, supervision, workplace safety arrangements and quality assurance processes. In addition, as the evidence demonstrates, significant work is already underway to return homes to stock and allocate them as quickly as possible, within established operational safety and allocation procedures. These are not barriers to community involvement. They are important safeguards that must be maintained to protect volunteers, protect tenants, and protect the public interest. And while I commend the genuine altruism of the proposal, any community involvement must complement existing processes, maintain appropriate safeguards, and support the efficient return of homes for allocation to people in need.

Mr Speaker, I also wish to acknowledge the focus the ACT government has on supporting the pathway out of homelessness. Homelessness is rarely caused by a single issue. For those experiencing chronic homelessness, the appropriate accommodation solution can often take time to develop, and requires significant outreach and engagement from a range of support services. Over the last few years, the ACT has observed an increase in the demand for homelessness services, coupled with an increase in the number of clients presenting with more complex needs. In response to this, the government has invested an additional \$16.9 million in homelessness services through the 2026-27 budget. This funds services to assist people to resolve crisis, re-establish family links where appropriate, and enhance the capacity of people to live independently.

Some of the services specifically targeting rough sleepers and/or those experiencing chronic homelessness include: the Early Morning Centre, which provides this highly vulnerable cohort of people with social connection, supports, food and referral to other services; the Street to Home program delivered by St Vincent de Paul, providing support to people who are sleeping rough and/or experiencing chronic homelessness; Axial Housing, a Housing First model which provides wraparound support services for those experiencing chronic homelessness; and Ainslie Lodge, a key crisis accommodation service for men. This service is a significant connection pathway for clients, both in terms of social connection but also connection to services more broadly through the co-location of food services, including Blue Door and Roadhouse, as well as the opportunity to leverage longer-term accommodation at Ainslie Village.

Mr Speaker, everyone involved in this discussion shares the same objective, ensuring more Canberrans have access to safe, secure and appropriate housing. The ACT government will continue investing in repairs and maintenance, improving property condition, reducing vacancy periods, and tenanting properties as quickly as possible.

At the same time, we will continue ongoing conversations with volunteers about their skills, energy and commitment—and how that may be harnessed to support vulnerable Canberrans, as we do all share the goal of reducing vacancy periods and helping more Canberrans access housing.

Just before concluding and moving my amendment, I would just like to address some of the comments and questions that Mr Emerson raised in his speech. What I would again just like to point out, I am referring to my earlier comments, is the headline numbers do not reflect or show the churn that sits underneath that. And I do need to stress, as I said in my earlier remarks, that what you see at one point in time to another

point in time is not necessarily going to be representative of exactly the same houses being counted in both. We will see houses move in and move out of that number.

We will also see that number fluctuate, and that is because Housing ACT, when a lease ends, will have the keys handed back in, and we will see the property come online. That will fluctuate as to when people's leases finish and when they do not finish. It is not something where we say, "On this date you must be out so that we can preplan our work program."

I think there was a question around value for money and what this means, given that this is a no-cost to government. I think the first thing I would like to point out is there is a cost to government. We have already spent a lot of time working through the proposal and assessing it. And, while the supply of the workers and the tradespeople and, potentially, the products will also be nil cost to government, there is still a cost to us in coordination and in support.

Value for money also moves beyond just the price cost, and this goes to matters of probity and ensuring that we are meeting our commitments under the Financial Management Act around not exposing ourselves to risk or liability. And that goes to, where works are done, that the government has the confidence that those works will not result in any malfunction or defect—and also just value propositions around risk management of those on site doing work. These are all things that we have to consider—and we should be considering—to ensure that everyone undertaking work on ACT government public infrastructure is safe, and that the work that is being done is to the highest quality.

I think the other part is there was a comment as to red tape or obstacles being created. I do not think that is a fair reflection of the discussions that have been had. Where government has raised concerns, they have been genuine ones that go to our statutory obligations that we must meet. So, not only are the points around safety, around ensuring that the works that are undertaken are of a high quality—and I am not slighting anyone in this—but it is an assurance we need to be able to verify. That is part of the proposition for the public value.

It is also going to privacy concerns for the public housing tenants. We have statutory obligations to ensure the privacy of Canberrans living in ACT public housing, and we need to make sure that we are working through, and that we can meet those obligations in any proposal that is put forward.

I seek leave to move the amendments circulated in my name.

Leave granted.

MS ORR: I move:

After paragraph (2), insert:

“(2A) further notes:·

- (a) the ACT Government has an existing contractual arrangement with (Programmed Facilities Management (Programmed)) as the public

housing facilities manager;

- (b) “vacancy time” refers to the period a property does not have an active tenancy;
- (c) following a tenancy ending, Housing ACT will determine how the property will be used in the future and together with Programmed to identify any repairs and maintenance to be undertaken;
- (d) repairs and maintenance works range from cleaning to structural repairs and can include insurance works;
- (e) as at 30 June 2026, the 285 vacant properties cited in this motion were going through a maintenance or upgrade process as follows:
 - (i) 79 required routine maintenance;
 - (ii) 80 required single upgrades;
 - (iii) 69 required multiple upgrades; and
 - (iv) 57 required major works or insurance repairs
- (f) performance against key indicators under the Total Facilities Management Contract for Quarter 4 2025-26 are showing that vacant properties are being returned from Programmed to Housing ACT at an average of:
 - (i) 8 days for routine works;
 - (ii) 25 days for single upgrades; and
 - (iii) 36 days for multiple upgrades.
- (g) as noted in QTON No 214, the average vacancy time of 284 days for the 285 properties in the ‘maintenance or upgrade’ category at 30 June 2026 is skewed by properties requiring extensive works or are in the insurance path and it does not reflect how long properties are with Programmed for repairs and maintenance;
- (h) upon completion of repairs and maintenance the property is offered to tenants by Housing ACT and in line with statutory obligations;
- (i) the average period for allocation of property to a tenant is highly variable;
- (j) while the 20Homes proposal carries is being offered at no cost, the underlying procurement principles remain relevant, including value for money, transparency of decision-making, appropriate process, fair and equitable treatment of prospective suppliers, risk management, probity and ethical conduct;
- (k) in addition to providing public housing, the ACT Government supports the pathway out of homelessness through specialised programs with wrap around services and supports coordinated by community housing providers and community sector organisations; and
- (l) community providers of homelessness crisis accommodation and wrap around services have indicated they would be interested in connecting with the 20Homes organisers to potentially partner with them on an initiative such as that being proposed;”.

In paragraph (3)(a) omit “to commence by the end of September 2026”.

After paragraph “(3) calls on the ACT Government to:” insert:

“(a) subject to all relevant statutory obligations being met, including tenant privacy requirements and probity obligations, and to Mr Warren and his team entering into appropriate contractual arrangements with the ACT Government’s public housing facilities manager, Programmed Facilities Management;”.

Just very quickly and in closing, I would note, as I flagged, the amendment puts in a lot more contextual information but it also, in the calls-in section, puts a “subject to” working with the group to make sure that all relevant statutory obligations are met—including that tenancy privacy, probity obligations and all contractual arrangements that we have with suppliers and places are also respected. And that is a reflection of these being genuine requirements on government, and we cannot waiver from those.

MS VASSAROTTI (Kurrajong) (3.35): I rise to speak in support of this motion, and I would like to thank Mr Emerson for bringing forward this important issue to the Assembly.

Public housing is an issue I am passionate about. I have spoken many times in this place about my distress that we find ourselves in a situation where we have 3,652 people currently on the waiting list. Members will know that last term I had ministerial responsibilities around housing and homelessness, and this included the public housing waitlist. I looked at this number of people every night before I went to bed, to at least bear witness to the thousands of people who were not as lucky as I to have a safe place to sleep each night.

I will reflect over that period that it was extremely frustrating that I had ministerial responsibilities for the waitlist but no responsibilities for repairs, maintenance or new stock to support people getting into homes quickly or to support quicker turnaround times that could help alleviate the crisis we face.

I am not alone in my distress. It reflects the significant community concern about the shortage of public housing across the ACT. We know that growth in public stock is not keeping pace with population growth or the level of need in our community—and the public housing waitlist is growing as a result.

Given this, anything that we can do to get even one more family into a safe and secure home is worth it—and 20 seems so much better.

The depth of the issue is immense, and it will not be solved by a single motion or a single initiative. This motion will not increase the total amount of public housing stock. This motion will not stop Housing ACT being the landlord of last resort when the community actually needs abundant and attractive public housing with a diversity of tenants. This motion will not solve the decades of under-investment in public housing nor will it change the system where we treat housing as a commodity designed to generate wealth for investors, rather than a fundamental right for all people.

What this motion will do, however, is respond to one aspect of the problem. Of particular value, it will provide a mechanism for the community to become part of the solution around getting people into current public homes as soon as possible.

This motion sits in a context. The proportion of ACT public housing in acceptable condition has decreased to 71 per cent, and there are around 285 dwellings that require maintenance or upgrades to be tenable. These are dwellings that could be homes for members of our community. I welcome anyone who lends a helping hand for people on our public housing waiting list, to get them into homes while they are doing it tough.

While I acknowledge that building more public housing stock may take some time and there is still work to do to dismantle a housing system that puts profits over people, this motion is the kind of low-hanging fruit that we are always looking for; the kind of work that can improve housing outcomes for people, right here right now. It is about being innovative, experimenting and trying out new things.

I have been really heartened by the outpouring of community support on this initiative. I want to credit Jonny Warren, who comes to this issue with an inspiring life story and a heart for those who experience homelessness. I want to shout out to his initiative and ability to bring people together.

I also acknowledge Jo Farrell, the 2024 ACT Australian of the Year and the Build Like a Girl foundation, who will also be a key part of the project. Ms Farrell is an inspiration, and her experience of working on initiatives such as the Strathnairn Charity House brings knowledge and insights to this proposed project. It is Canberra at its best. It makes me really proud to be part of the Canberra community.

Given the situation we are in, regarding the lack of safe homes for people, we really need to experiment and test ideas, and we need to work together as a community. It is a really exciting opportunity for us to look at solutions to this issue. It has been encouraging to see the minister for housing willing to take on this idea and give it a go. I acknowledge there are some regulatory hurdles to go through, and really wanted to acknowledge her office and the work that officials are doing to engage on this and work through those issues. So, along with Mr Emerson, I will be supporting the amendments circulated by Minister Orr.

There are some other amendments that have not been moved yet. Should I speak to those in anticipation?

MR SPEAKER: You can speak to them if you want to now, just noting that we will probably deal with Ms Orr's amendment before going to them.

MS VASSAROTTI: Yes. So, just recognising that there have been amendments also put forward by Minister Cheyne. I did want to note that the ACT Greens will not be supporting those amendments circulated by the Manager of Government Business.

The purpose of this motion is to implement a new and exciting idea for supporting our neighbours in public housing. But, more than just a project, this motion is about letting people know that public housing is a real solution to the housing crisis. Outside these 20 dwellings, we need to improve the rate that we are getting people into public housing. Improving accountability indicators is one step to making the kind of systemic change we need urgently. It is really positive to see the increased budget around this issue that Minister Orr spoke about in her speech. We want to see this continue, and hope that an average target of 90 days is achievable.

While I deeply understand the complexity of this issue, having a priority to get people into homes quickly should be something we can all agree to. And having clear, measurable targets helps everyone understand and, importantly, achieve this priority.

This leads me to Ms Carrick's amendment that will also be tabled shortly and which the ACT Greens will also be supporting.

Again, we prioritise what we measure. Identifying this as an accountability measure enables us to track how we are going, improves transparency and enhances further accountability on this important issue.

The Greens believe public housing is the answer to the housing crisis. We believe housing is a human right and that government should intervene when the private market has failed.

I really welcome this motion. I wanted to acknowledge all of the community members that have come together to support this initiative and I really look forward to seeing how it emerges. This motion is a small step towards a Canberra with thriving and flourishing public housing; public housing where we see Housing ACT as a landlord of choice rather than of last resort. I commend the motion to the Assembly.

MS BARRY (Ginninderra) (3.43): I, too, rise in support of Mr Emerson's motion. I thank Mr Emerson for bringing this motion to the attention of the Assembly, although we did not need to be debating this, if I am to be honest. I remember that, when I saw the announcement on TV and in the paper, I said, "Why does Emerson get all the nice announceables?" I thought, "Wow, this is an incredible show of the best of our humanity. It's an incredible show of what we can achieve when we come together."

I want to thank Mr Warren for such a beautiful gift to our community. I also want to thank Ms Farrell and the over 200 local tradespersons who have put their name to this. Thank you very much for this kind offer of generosity.

It is at the core of our DNA as Liberals to champion taking initiative, particularly from the private sector. In this case, while responsibility for relieving public housing unavailability should not have to be shouldered by the community, it is admirable that the community has come together to demonstrate that the plight of Canberrans is also shared by local people.

As I have indicated, Mr Warren, Ms Farrell and volunteers have decided to give their time to get 20 homes up and running by Christmas to 20 families who need them. I know there have been conversations about why this cannot happen. I understand some issues that the government might face in implementing this, but when I received this motion, I said to myself, "I can't believe that the government is stuffing up a gift." It is a gift, and I could not understand how we could reject a gift.

I must admit that I have not had the same level of engagement with the minister's office as the rest of my colleagues, including Mr Emerson, have had. I would have thought that, if there were red-tape issues or operational questions, that could have been sorted out way in advance, even, of a contractual agreement. I am pleased to see that the

minister has somehow reached a consensus position. It is pleasing to see that she is willing to attempt to address this issue.

We know that Canberrans on the waiting list are waiting, on average, for five years. We have spoken ad nauseam, for a very long time, in this place about the issues facing housing. It is pleasing to see the community coming together to offer up solutions. When our community offers to step up and help for free, and bring the waiting list down, we should be doing everything we can to make that happen. We see this attitude of, “No, we cannot, we cannot,” by the government across every sector.

When Canberra’s community clubs offered land and capital to build affordable housing for key workers, they were told it did not fit planning policy. When parent groups offered to build shade sails at public schools at no cost, or when retired nurses offered to volunteer in our walk-in centres to cut wait times, they were blocked by procurement, insurance and red tape. When Calvary offered to continue running the hospital and invest \$20 million of its own money to upgrade it, the government said it could not be done, and acquired it. It is always about starting from a place of deficit. This government needs to change the mindset and start from a place of, “Yes, we can. How can we make it happen?”

Once again, I would like to commend with gratitude the initiative that has been shown by the over 200 local tradespeople who have volunteered their time and skills in service of our city. As I have indicated, you represent the best of our community, you represent the best of humanity, and we thank you for it.

Speaking to the government’s amendments, we will be supporting Ms Orr’s amendments, although, when we received the amendments, I thought, “I don’t know. This is probably a loophole for the government to get out of this agreement.” I am hoping that we are all acting in good faith and that the government and Ms Orr’s office will do all that they can to ensure that this project goes ahead.

We will also be supporting Ms Carrick’s amendment, as I think it improves the motion significantly. But we will not be supporting Ms Cheyne’s amendments when they have been moved because, in my view, and in the Canberra Liberals’ view, they make a material difference to the motion.

Once again, I thank Mr Emerson for bringing this motion to the Assembly, and I commend the motion.

Ms Orr’s amendments agreed to.

MR SPEAKER: The question is that Mr Emerson’s motion, as amended, be agreed to.

MS CHEYNE (Ginninderra—Manager of Government Business, Attorney-General, Minister for City and Government Services, and Minister for Transport) (3.49), by leave: I move:

1. In paragraph (3)(d) after “no greater than 90 days” insert: “excluding properties requiring extensive repairs or maintenance that would reasonably take more than 90 days to complete or are subject to an

- insurance claim or are in the hard to let category;”.
2. In paragraph (3)(e) omit “revise”, substitute “look at revising”.

I have nothing to add, because this is a procedural approach that Minister Orr and I have decided to take, to make this as neat as possible, given the many amendments floating around. I will hand over to the responsible minister.

MR SPEAKER: The question is that Ms Cheyne’s amendments to the motion, as amended, be agreed to.

MS ORR (Yerrabi—Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water, Minister for Disability, Autism and Neurodiversity, Minister for Housing and Homelessness, and Minister for Equality) (3.50): As Minister Cheyne mentioned, we have procedurally split a larger amendment in two. Noting that everyone has flagged that they support parts of it but not other parts, we wanted to make it simpler than going clause by clause and making what already has quite a few pieces of paper floating around even more complicated.

The reason for these amendments—I understand that they are not supported, but I will give the context as to why we have moved them—is to make the intent of changing these reporting features practicable. Certainly, I can understand the position of other members of the Assembly that they would like to see more reporting. I have already said to Mr Emerson in the lead-up to this debate that, through this motion being brought forward, it has become clear that there is more information that can be put out there. Obviously, harnessing a lot of information from our datasets is a bit of a task, and we would have appreciated a bit more time and a bit more scope to work through what we could put forward that is reliable on an ongoing basis. I appreciate that it is not the will of the Assembly to give us much of an opportunity to work through that one, so we will endeavour to do what we can.

I would also like to pick up on some of the other comments that have come through in the debate on the amended motion, while also noting this morning’s debate on when motions of the Assembly are passed and meeting the expectations of the Assembly. I would like to be very clear, within the context of comments such as “loopholes” and “the minister is not trying” that at no time have I said no to this proposal. I have said that there are genuine concerns that obligations that the government has cannot be met with what has been proposed to date.

Those are the parts that need to be worked through. That is what is reflected in the amendments put forward in the “calls-on” which has been supported by everyone in the chamber. I do not think anyone would say that we should walk away from our privacy obligations or that we should walk away from our probity or safety obligations. I would like to state very clearly on the record in the chamber that unless we can work through those options, it is not a *fait accompli* that we will be able to go forward with the proposal.

I would note that Mr Emerson, in his remarks, said—I am paraphrasing, so I apologise if it is not word for word—“Here’s the proposal. It’s come forward with goodwill.” It was something along the lines of, “Why can’t government respond with, ‘Here is how you can help us’?” Mr Emerson, I am happy to take that on board in the context of what

I have just said, in that there might not be a pathway through, if we cannot resolve all the issues that are there. I can certainly look at alternatives, and I am happy to put alternatives to harness that goodwill so that the group can still contribute to the community.

I would say that there is still a bit to work through in this matter. Certainly, in moving the amendments and in signing up to the motion, the government will continue to do that. If we cannot move through those, we can look for alternatives. But it will require those on both sides of this discussion to have a bit of give and take. It is not just a matter of the government being flexible; it is also a matter of having that reciprocated.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (3.54): I will briefly explain why I will not be supporting Ms Cheyne's amendments. I was happy to support Ms Orr's amendments. Ms Barry reflected that they might create a little bit of a loophole. Hopefully, they do not. Hopefully, the way that they have been worded keeps the government on the hook for making it happen, while providing a pathway to make it happen. I think Ms Barry reflected rightly in her remarks that we are all accepting that in good faith; hopefully, that is how things proceed.

These specific amendments would soften the commitments that I touched on earlier regarding the vacancy turnaround times by excluding properties from that 90-day target that require extensive repairs or maintenance that would reasonably take more than 90 days to complete, are subject to an insurance claim, or are in the hard-to-let category. It is a 90-day average, so it is okay to have some properties that take more than 90 days. If you are still hitting your 90-day average, I would hope that some properties take far less than 90 days.

I want to touch on the hard-to-let category, because this is something that is within the government's control to address. I think it is strange that we are okay with having homes in the hard-to-let category and leaving them there. There are communities like those in Oaks Estate who have called for a plan to address the hard-to-let properties. They acknowledge that not only is it a problem for existing residents who are in those complexes—and they are generally these higher density complexes, which we know do not work when it comes to providing positive social outcomes—but they are a problem for residents generally. They are a problem for those tenants who really feel that they have nowhere else to go, and they accept a hard-to-let tenancy. It also becomes a problem for the broader community. Retaining those within the broader 90-day target is important, because it provides an incentive—if there was not one already—for the government to address that issue.

On the other proposed amendments, the original motion calls on the government to "revise" the accountability indicator for public housing occupancy to at least 98 per cent. These amendments would change that to "look at revising" the target. Come on! Let us just revise it, not look at it.

For those reasons, I will not be supporting these couple of amendments, and I understand other members will not be, either.

MR SPEAKER: The question is that Ms Cheyne's amendments to Mr Emerson's motion, as amended, be agreed to.

Ms Cheyne's amendments negatived.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (3.57): I rise to support Mr Emerson's motion and the intent behind it. I have circulated an amendment to paragraph (3)(d), which I now move:

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

“(d) establish a new accountability indicator for the average vacancy time for public housing properties requiring maintenance or upgrades, with a target of 90 days or less; and”.

I would also like to acknowledge everyone that has supported this initiative in the Assembly today. It is terrific. I would particularly like to congratulate Jonny Warren and Jo Farrell on this initiative. We keep hearing from the community about, and members of this Assembly are continually calling for, more investment in public, social and affordable housing across the ACT. The reason is simple: public housing stock has not kept pace with population growth and demand, while too many vulnerable Canberrans remain stuck on waiting lists.

Mr Emerson's proposed initiative highlights the immense support across our community for helping those in need. The fact that so many tradespeople, businesses and volunteers have come forward and are willing to donate their time and skills demonstrates both the generosity of Canberrans and the growing frustration with the pace at which vacant housing is being returned to service.

While it is encouraging to see this level of community support, we should also be clear that maintaining and tenanting public housing, ultimately, is the responsibility of government. This is a core government function. Community goodwill can help, but it should not be relied upon as a substitute for a properly functioning public housing system.

My amendment replaces the directive that the government simply commit to a vacancy target with the requirement to establish a new accountability indicator for the average vacancy time of public housing properties requiring maintenance upgrades, with a target of 90 days or less. The distinction is important. If we are serious about driving improvement, we need transparency and accountability. The Assembly and the community should be able to see, year after year, whether performance is improving, whether resources are being allocated effectively, and whether Housing ACT is meeting its objectives.

What gets measured gets managed. A formal accountability indicator means performance is reported publicly and regularly. It creates a mechanism for ongoing scrutiny rather than a one-off commitment that can be forgotten once this debate has ended. Given we are told that properties requiring maintenance are sitting vacant for many months—sometimes approaching a year—it is entirely reasonable to expect the government to report against a target for an average of 90 days or less and explain any failure to meet it. It is a real shame that, in a wealthy city like Canberra, some of the most vulnerable members of our community have waited so long for housing while properties sit empty. This initiative would not be necessary if the system were working

as it should.

I welcome the community's efforts to help address this challenge, and I urge the government to ensure that the lessons learned are incorporated into its own maintenance and tenancy practices. Most importantly, we should ensure that future progress is measured transparently and publicly, which is precisely what this amendment seeks to achieve.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (4.00): I thank Ms Carrick for bringing this amendment forward. It strengthens the core to a clear target for the vacancy turnaround time and will provide, hopefully in budget papers and annual reports, something that we can measure that target against, and we could ask the government questions about it and ensure there is accountability. I really thank Ms Carrick for posting something to actually strengthen the motion that I have brought forward today. I am broadly very happy with how the debate has gone and that there is a lot of support across the chamber to see this initiative realised, and, more broadly, for the issues that we are facing in the provision of public housing and in tackling the homelessness crisis in the ACT to be a priority for the entire Assembly. That is really encouraging.

The minister mentioned that there has been across-the-government engagement on this proposal. Fair enough—time is money, but time is money for people waiting for a home. That is why there is some urgency, and that is why people have been pushing for this initiative to be picked up by the government. They have been saying “Let’s do this now. Let’s do this before Christmas. Let’s get started. We want to get to work.”

On time being money and there being a cost to government for coordinating, organising and contributing their time to this initiative, I want to acknowledge again the people in the gallery and the people who have been driving this campaign, because their time is money too. We are all being paid to be here, but they are not, so I really appreciate them taking time out of their afternoon to be here and be part of this—in prime money-making time, prime working time and business hours—and thank them for all the effort that they are putting in around their existing paid employment and other responsibilities to drive an initiative like this. A lot of effort has gone into trying to make this happen, and there will be a lot more moving forward. We have all been patting them on the back, and maybe too much, but I think that contribution is worthy of acknowledgement.

What we get to when we talk about this issue—and it is in the data that the minister put forward in her amendments—is that it is very complex and complicated to tackle the housing crisis, deal with 12,000 public homes, manage these properties, make sure they are maintained and repaired, get them tenanted, make sure they match with tenants appropriately et cetera, and I get that. I do not want to dismiss that it is all very complex and complicated. But it is incredibly complex and complicated to be someone without a home. It is incredibly complex and complicated to sleep rough on our streets and not get the support that you need. It is very complex and complicated to be a child growing up in the back of their parents’ car because they do not have a place to stay. It is complex and complicated if you are living with violence in your home and you do not have a place to go, and then you find out that there are 588 government owned homes that do not have anyone in them. That is complex and complicated.

It is the government's job to deal with complexity, but people in our community are suffering. Vulnerable people, who are the least able and the least well-positioned to deal with complex and complicated matters, have to every day. What kind of foundation does it give someone for their life? The complexity for them of just having a place to sleep is something that they are not able to deal with. What about all the other complexities that we have to deal with in our lives? What kind of a foundation does that provide for someone? Yes, government is complex and complicated, but it is far more complex to be a person experiencing homelessness in this town and not have a way out.

I again thank everyone for being willing to talk about that, being willing to talk about solutions, and being willing to tackle some of the complexities for the people who are least able to tackle them for themselves.

MR SPEAKER: The question is that Ms Carrick's amendment to Mr Emerson's motion, as amended, be agreed to.

Ms Carrick's amendment agreed to.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Tuggeranong—sports and recreation facilities

MR MILLIGAN (Yerrabi) (4.05): Together with Mrs Morris, I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) residents of Tuggeranong have been promised significant sporting infrastructure by the Government over successive elections;
- (b) the Government first promised a new ice sports facility in Tuggeranong at the 2016 election and repeated that commitment at the 2020 and 2024 elections;
- (c) in November 2022, the Government signed a non-binding agreement for the proposed facility and committed \$16.265 million towards its construction;
- (d) the Government announced in September 2026 that the Tuggeranong facility would not proceed;
- (e) at the 2024 election, the Government made further commitments to sporting infrastructure in Tuggeranong, including:
 - (i) increasing parking at Wanniasa Playing Fields;
 - (ii) improving female-friendly facilities at Wanniasa Playing Fields;
 - (iii) upgrading Tuggeranong Skate Park;
 - (iv) working with the Pines Tennis Club in Chisholm on its expansion plans;
 - (v) upgrading sporting facilities at Caroline Chisholm Senior School;
 - (vi) upgrading the Gowrie cricket nets;
 - (vii) improving female-friendly changerooms and facilities at Calwell

Playing Fields;

- (viii) providing a portable grandstand at Gordon Playing Fields;
- (ix) upgrading facilities at Tuggeranong Lakeside Leisure Centre; and
- (x) upgrading facilities at Erindale Active Leisure Centre;
- (f) a number of these commitments remain undelivered; and
- (g) following the cancellation of the ice sports facility, the Government promised to retain the full \$16.265 million for sporting and recreational infrastructure in Tuggeranong;
- (2) condemns the Government for breaking its repeated promise to deliver a new ice sports facility in Tuggeranong; and
- (3) calls on the Government to:
 - (a) by the final sitting day of October 2026, table a statement showing which of the 2024 election commitments for sporting infrastructure in Tuggeranong have been funded, the amount of funding and the anticipated timeline of delivery;
 - (b) by the final sitting day of October 2026, table a separate investment plan for the \$16.265 million, specifying:
 - (i) each project to be funded;
 - (ii) the location and scope of each project;
 - (iii) the funding allocated to each project;
 - (iv) the expected commencement and completion dates; and
 - (v) if any of the \$16.265 million will be used to rebadge, replace or offset funding for an existing or previously announced commitment; and
 - (c) ensure that the projects funded through the \$16.265 million are fully appropriated with clear delivery schedules in place in the 2027 ACT Budget update.

I rise today to speak to this joint motion with my colleague Ms Deborah Morris to restore integrity to sporting commitments in Tuggeranong. There is a very simple principle at the heart of this motion: when the government makes a promise, it should keep it. For residents of Tuggeranong, the expectation has been tested too many times, and there is perhaps no clearer example than the promised ice sports facility.

This was not a promise made once. It was first promised in 2016, then again in 2020, and it was again repeated in 2024. For the better part of a decade, the people of Tuggeranong were told that this facility was coming. In November 2022, the government went even further. It signed a non-binding agreement for the proposed facility and committed \$16.265 million towards its construction. To the community, this was no longer some distant aspiration. After years of waiting, it appeared the government was finally going to deliver, but, in September this year, 2026, the government announced that the facility would not proceed. That is three election commitments. A decade has passed and, ultimately, there is no facility.

The community is now asking if Canberra will receive a new rink any time soon. I am not confident that this government can deliver one, given that after 10 years we are back

to square one. What ice rink developer in their right mind would look at how Labor has handled the Greenway project and conclude that they should invest in building sporting infrastructure with this government? Imagine being a young ice hockey player or a figure skater who first heard of the promise back in 2016. That young person could have gone through their entire junior sporting career waiting for a facility that never arrived. That is why the issue is bigger than a single sporting facility, because, when a government walks away from a commitment of this scale after nearly a decade, people naturally begin to question the commitments that follow, and plenty have been listed in this motion.

The community deserves to know which have been funded, how much has been allocated and when the government will deliver. That is what this motion is asking for the government to provide. By the final sitting day of October 2026, as it stands in the motion, the government should table a statement showing which of its 2024 sporting infrastructure commitments for Tuggeranong have been funded, how much funding has been allocated to each, and the anticipated timeframe for delivery. That should not be too controversial. Amendments have been circulated requesting that the tabling of this information will be in February 2027. Those on this side of the chamber are happy with that amendment and will support it. If these projects are funded and progressing, the government should have no difficulty in providing this information by February 2027.

Election commitments matter. Sporting clubs plan around them, community organisations invest time and effort in them, families build expectations around them, and voters are entitled to expect that commitments made during an election will mean something after the election. The people of Tuggeranong have already seen one major sporting commitment disappear after years of assurances. They should not have to simply take the government's word that the remaining commitments will be delivered.

The government cannot restore confidence with another broken promise. It has to show that these promises are being delivered. So table the findings, table the fundings, provide the timelines, tell the community what is proceeding, and then deliver it. Tuggeranong residents deserve certainty about what comes next. They deserve transparency, accountability and delivery, and they deserve to know that, when their government makes a commitment, its word can be trusted.

MRS MORRIS (Brindabella) (4.10): I rise to speak to the motion that has been circulated in my name and Mr Milligan's name. For decades, the people of Tuggeranong were led to believe that, if they voted for ACT Labor, the Labor government would deliver them a new ice sports facility. The new ice facility was first promised by the ACT Labor government at the 2016 election, and it was then promised again in 2020 and again in 2024. And, after 10 years of saying one thing, the Labor government have recently broken their promise, betraying not just the people of Tuggeranong but every Canberran who was expecting a new ice rink. They have broken a decade-old promise and now are trying to take some moral high ground for doing so.

But the truth is that the government are in complete and utter chaos. They cannot be trusted to deliver for Tuggeranong, let alone for Canberra. Three of their Labor ministers have been censured. The former Deputy Chief Minister has been forced to resign over a major corruption scandal. The Greens have walked away from Labor. The Labor government have completely lost control of their budget. They have been caught

out issuing \$600 fines to people without the authorisation to do so. The government are in complete and utter chaos. The Chief Minister has lost control and Labor cannot be trusted to deliver for Tuggeranong. Their decade-old, broken promise to deliver an ice rink for the people of Tuggeranong demonstrates that point very, very clearly.

Members interjecting—

MRS MORRIS: Look how worked up they are getting. Everything I have just stated is a fact, and I know facts hurt. Facts can really hurt when the government are in the complete and utter chaos that they are in. The community expects us, in this Assembly, to hold the government to account. If an election commitment is made three times over 10 years, the community expects the government to deliver, but this Labor government have failed to deliver, and that is why it is only right that we hold them to account for that and condemn their betrayal of the people.

It is also why we need to demand transparency over their latest commitment, because the reality is, when they have the corruption, integrity and delivery problems that they have, how can anyone in Tuggeranong, or anyone in Canberra for that matter, trust that they will actually do anything they say? We just cannot. We need to have these accountability measures in place so that we do not find ourselves here 10 years later, waiting for this government to remember that Tuggeranong is also part of Canberra and waiting for them to deliver their commitments.

I am sure the government are going to tell us that they did everything that they possibly could to deliver, but I do not buy it, and, if you speak to anyone in Tuggeranong, they do not buy it either. This government promised construction would commence before 2020. Obviously that did not happen. They signed the heads of agreement only in 2022 and they set aside land and money only in 2023. Last year, after three elections of taking this commitment to the people, they were publicly undermining their development partners for holding up this development and causing delays. But then we learnt that the government had not even given their development partners a contract yet, so, while they were in the media publicly undermining them, they were sitting on a contract that they had not handed over to their development partners yet. In fact, it was only after this Assembly—through a motion that the Canberra Liberals moved, Mr Milligan and I—compelled the government to hand over the contract to the development partners that it actually happened.

Ultimately, this comes down to a government that has betrayed its word to the people, and that is something that we have to take very seriously in this place. After almost a decade, this government has walked away and broken the promise—plain and simple. The sad reality is that this is a pattern that people in Tuggeranong have seen before. This is something they have come to expect from this government. Labor makes grand announcements before an election. It puts out signs, media releases and glossy brochures and tells the community, “Delivery is just around the corner, so hold on tight,” and then there are years of delay and disappointment, chaos and disorder.

We should not have to wait until the next election to find out whether this latest commitment to the people of Tuggeranong will be delivered. Tuggeranong deserves so much better than that. We intend to hold this government to account for their promise to now deliver that funding to Tuggeranong, and that is why we put in this motion a

requirement of the government to table its investment plan for the entire \$16.265 million. The government must also disclose whether any of this money will be used to replace, rebadge or offset funding for other commitments that they had made at the last election. These are basic questions. These are questions that the community deserves to know the answers to. A list of possibilities will not be enough and a round of consultations will not be enough. The \$16 million of funding must be in the budget and the projects must be identified, and there must be transparency around that process.

I note that amendments have been circulated. I thank both Miss Nuttall, my fellow member for Brindabella, and the minister's office for their engagement on this motion. The Canberra Liberals will be watching very closely how this money is used and whether it is actually delivered to the community. I hope you can forgive us for being a bit nervous that this government will not deliver on its promise, but that is a sentiment that is put to us all the time in the community, and it is only right that we raise it here in this place. Tuggeranong has already lost the ice rink, and we are not going to allow this government to pull back from its commitment to put that funding into the community. The people of Tuggeranong deserve honesty and they deserve accountability from this government, and that is exactly what we have sought to do with this motion.

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage, and Minister for Sport and Recreation) (4.18): I thank Mrs Morris and Mr Milligan for bringing this motion to the Assembly, and I acknowledge the intent of the request, which is to provide transparency around the government's delivery of existing sporting infrastructure commitments in Tuggeranong; and further detail the approach relating to additional sport infrastructure investment, following the cessation of the Tuggeranong ice sports facility project.

The government supports keeping the Assembly and the community informed about the progress of election commitments. We have been transparent and accountable throughout the term in tracking delivery against those commitments—both the government directly, but also local members for Tuggeranong. While he could not be here today, Taimus Werner-Gibbings has a good running tracker on his own website showing our delivery and tracking our commitments in Tuggeranong that we made at the 2024 election.

A number of the election commitments have already been delivered; a number have already been funded and are progressing through design and delivery phases. And the first part of this motion, the noting section, I think is not completely accurate about where things are up to, and I can run through a few of the different projects that we committed to.

At Wanniasa playing fields, a feasibility study was funded, investigating opportunities for increased parking capacity and improving access for users attending sport and recreation activities at the venue. The government has also committed to delivering female-friendly facility upgrades at the site, with the works prioritised for 28-29.

Tuggeranong skatepark funding was provided through the 2025-26 ACT budget to undertake immediate repairs and minor improvements, and a feasibility study for a future comprehensive upgrade. That feasibility contract has been awarded. Concept

options are being developed, and consultation has occurred with skate and BMX users. Repair works are expected to be completed around the end of this year, with minor improvements following early in 2027.

The government has also been progressing our commitment to work with the Pines tennis club on its expansion plans, with an ACT government grant of \$9,900 which was provided as part of the 2023 Sport and Recreation Infrastructure Scheme to support the development of a concept design and high-level cost plan to guide the club's future growth strategy.

Several commitments have been delivered at Gowrie district playing fields, with a cricket net upgrade project that has been completed with the landscape consolidation period now underway. At Gordon playing fields, the government has delivered on our commitment to provide additional spectator infrastructure, with two portable grandstands installed in October 2025. Those facilities are now in use, providing good amenity for our local sporting clubs down there. The government will also be progressing upgrades to change rooms and supporting facilities at Calwell playing fields in 26-27. These will achieve female-friendly status and create more accessible and inclusive facilities that support greater participation by everyone in sport.

Significant investment has also occurred at Tuggeranong major aquatic facilities. At Lakeside Leisure Centre, the government has already delivered the new hydrotherapy pool. It has proven extremely popular with residents and community groups, and \$500,000 has been allocated for further upgrades, including change room improvements, modernisation of timekeeping systems and landscaping works to improve the outdoor recreational areas. Similarly at Erindale, a huge amount of work is going to be happening there. Approximately \$300,000 has already been invested since 2024 in plant and equipment, renewal and replacement of pool grates, changeroom upgrades and other maintenance works. And then a further \$1.1 million has been allocated in 26-27 to undertake major maintenance work in the pool hall, including repainting, rust prevention, treatment of the roof structure, investigating accessibility improvements, and supporting future improvements to the gymnasium as well, in partnership with the centre operator, Belgravia Leisure.

So, these examples are quite different from what is proposed in the noting section of this motion. They demonstrate substantial progress on commitments that we made in the election to Tuggeranong, to invest in our sport and recreational infrastructure. And the government is committed to further updating the Assembly on the status of these commitments and the funding allocated to date, and anticipated delivery timeframes.

However, in relation to the ice sports facility in Tuggeranong, the ACT government has been clear that although—in line with our election commitment to keep working with the private company to construct the new indoor sports facility—we did work with the private company this term to consider an updated proposal that was presented in January 2026, following a tender evaluation process the Chief Minister and Economic Development Directorate determined that this did not represent value for money for the territory. And as a result, that ice sports facility will not proceed.

We have been very transparent and accountable about our decision in relation to that. And we are happy to answer what questions we can from the Assembly about that,

within the commercial and probity constraints of a tender process like this. And we have been very clear to the community, as much as we can, about the rationale why we made that decision. And despite the extensive discussions with the project proponents throughout the process, since they were shortlisted under the original expression-of-interest process, the government and delivery partners were unable to reach agreement on the way forward on that project. And as a result, it will not be proceeding.

Throughout the process, the government was committed to work with the partners to deliver a suitable facility within the funding envelope. The updated proposal unfortunately sought increased financial assistance from the ACT government, which was more than double what had originally been requested in the high-level proposal received.

Having regard to the cost and the other unacceptable risks identified in the proposal, the directorate had assessed that the proposal did not represent value for money for the territory.

The government recognises the need for investment in ice sports facilities, and we will work with the ice sports community—who were very supportive of this project being delivered in Tuggeranong—and look at future opportunities for improvements to ice sports facilities in the ACT.

It is important to note that the requirement of an ice skating rink suitable for national competitions remains at the current Phillip ice skating centre site.

And I note the amendment that has been circulated there, which we support, to continue looking opportunities there as well.

While the outcome of the tender process has been disappointing for the government and for the ice sports community and for Tuggeranong, the commitment to Tuggeranong's sporting community remains strong.

The ACT government has committed that the funding that was committed to the ice sports facility of \$16.265 million will go towards delivering and upgrading other sporting infrastructure projects in Tuggeranong. The ACT government has invited ACT sporting clubs to share their sporting and recreational infrastructure needs with the government through a sport and active recreation infrastructure survey. The feedback from Tuggeranong's clubs to the survey will be considered and will inform a package of investment equivalent to the ACT government funding committed for the ice sports facility. So, the equivalent level of funding will be retained within Tuggeranong and committed towards delivering and upgrading vital sporting infrastructure projects in Tuggeranong.

And following stage 1 of the survey—going out to clubs, which will close on 2 October—stage 2 will then require ACT peak sport and recreation bodies to review any affiliate feedback and then finalise a sport-specific infrastructure priority list. That will commence on 12 October 2026 and close on 6 November 2026.

For that reason alone, although there are others, the government proposes that in relation to this motion, the investment plan for the \$16.265 million will need to be

tabled at a later date so that we can understand what the survey says from sporting clubs in Tuggeranong and the views of peak bodies, and also some consultation with the community which we are happy to support, as well, through the amendments to the motion today. And then of course we will need to consider, through budget review and budget process, the funding and the process for allocation.

The government is happy to be transparent about where funding will be spent and where the funding will come from. We have no issue with providing details of projects that will be supported through the investment, including information on their location, scope, funding allocation and delivery timeframes.

In fact, that is what the amendments that I have circulated seek to achieve. We are proposing a sensible and accountable process and, rather than providing incomplete or speculative information today or in October, the amendment requires the government to return to the Assembly by the final sitting day, February 2027, with a dedicated investment process plan for the full \$16.265 million commitment.

That will specify how the government plans to distribute the funding in advance of the budget. What this will do is reflect the advice of the public service that we will be receiving about the best way to make decisions about the allocation of the funding—whether it is through grant rounds, direct funding, or inviting applications. It will also enable us to incorporate community feedback that we have received. To the extent possible, we will provide information at that stage in February about the individual projects to be funded. I want to be clear that we will try and provide as much information as we can at that time about how the funding will be allocated.

There may not be, at that time, specific information about what specific infrastructure will be upgraded—if there is, for example, a grants program that will be in place—but at that time we will be able to say how that grant process will be run and, for example, the criteria associated with that, about the kinds of projects that we will be going to. So, I just want to be clear about that right now, before we commit to this, which in the amendment that I have circulated, that we will be showing how the money will be allocated. That, at that particular time in February, we will provide as much information as we can, noting that there may still be processes that need to occur after that time to specifically identify the exact infrastructure that will be upgraded, which will be based on the advice of the public service.

I just want to make that absolutely clear to everyone about what the intent of the amendment is, so that no one is coming back in February and saying, “Hey, you said that you were going to provide the detail of every single infrastructure project at that time.” The intent here is to provide information on how the project will be allocated, and we will do that based on the advice of the public service, and I will provide the information about that.

This will provide the Assembly and the community with a clear understanding about how the investment will be delivered. And importantly, the amendment that I have circulated also retains transparency around the source and purpose of the funding. It expressly requires the government to identify whether any of the \$16.265 million will be used to rebadge and replace or offset funding for an existing or previously-announced commitment. Obviously, this is a commitment of the same

amount of money that we had committed to the Tuggeranong ice sports facility, so the intention is that we would deliver that same amount to Tuggeranong. We have already delivered on a huge number of our election commitments in Tuggeranong, so it will be on top of that, and we are happy to come back with some further detail about that.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I know that members of this place and members of the community rightly expect clarity, and we are happy to provide that through the amendments and reporting back to the Assembly in February, and indeed beyond that point. And we want Tuggeranong residents and local sporting groups to have confidence that they can see exactly how these funds are being allocated and that they represent a genuinely new investment.

And the amendment goes further by ensuring that the proposal for the funding is outlined in the 2027-28 budget, accompanied by a clear delivery schedule.

This is about striking the right balance. It is about being transparent and accountable while also showing the information provided to the Assembly is accurate, comprehensive, and supported by proper planning and data and advice from the public service about the appropriate allocation of these funds. We want this funding to be invested in projects that deliver real benefits for Tuggeranong's sporting community. These amendments demonstrate that the government is prepared to be open about where the money is being spent, how much is being spent, when the projects will be delivered, and whether the funding represents new investment. I believe that is a reasonable, responsible and transparent approach, and I commend the amendments to the Assembly.

I will just quickly speak to the other amendment that I have circulated, which is noted as number 1. We cannot, obviously, support the part of the motion that condemns the government for acting in the best interests of Tuggeranong in pursuing this project in Tuggeranong. We were committed to Tuggeranong. We put money on the table. We went through a proper tender process to see that opportunity realised.

It has been incredibly disappointing to see the Liberals coming out, after an announcement about the tender outcome last week, suggesting that we should never have committed this for Tuggeranong—because they never did, let's be clear about that, at the last election. We believe that was absolutely reasonable, and we will always back Tuggeranong, and we are backing Tuggeranong by making sure that investment stays in Tuggeranong.

I seek leave to move both amendments circulated in my name together.

Leave not granted.

Mr Steel: On a point of order: I would then have to seek leave to speak again and I think that would be ridiculous.

Standing orders—suspension

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

Suspension of standing orders—Moving amendments: Mr Steel moved—That so

much of the standing orders be suspended as would prevent Mr Steel from moving amendments together.

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage, and Minister for Sport and Recreation) (4.34): I move both amendments circulated in my name:

Mr Steel moved the following amendments together:

1. Omit paragraph (2), substitute: “the Assembly notes that ACT Labor did not meet its election commitment in ACT Labor’s Tuggeranong Regional Plans to ‘keep working with a private company to construct the new indoor ice sport facility’. Whilst the Government did work with a private company this term to consider an updated proposal presented in January 2026, the proposal did not represent value for money for the Territory”.
2. Omit all words after paragraph (3)(a), substitute:
 - “(b) by the final sitting day of February 2027, table a separate investment process plan for the \$16.265 million, specifying:
 - (i) each project to be funded;
 - (ii) the location and scope of each project;
 - (iii) the funding allocated to each project;
 - (iv) the expected commencement and completion dates; and
 - (v) if any of the \$16.265 million will be used to rebadge, replace or offset funding for an existing or previously announced commitment; and
 - (c) ensure that a proposal for the \$16.265 million in funding is outlined in the 2027-2028 Budget with a clear delivery schedule in place.”.

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (4.34): The Greens were operating on the presumption that these amendments would be voted on separately. And I still hope that can be the case because the Greens would like to foreshadow that they will not be supporting the first amendment from Mr Steel, but we will be supporting the second.

The ACT Greens will not be supporting this first amendment because it omits a key line of accountability on Labor’s broken promise to deliver this ice rink.

I do not disagree that some of the responsibility for the failure of the Tuggeranong ice rink rests squarely on the proponents, especially with the revelation that they made more than double their asking price for the facility. The territory is not made of money, especially in a constrained financial environment. However, the community cannot ignore that Labor sought, and likely achieved, some degree of electoral success from promising a project that people wanted. Ten years later, even if there was a rationalisable series of events that led them there, the Tuggeranong community has still been promised something that will now never happen.

And I do not think that we are doing our jobs as elected representatives if we do not take this opportunity to hold government accountable for a promise that they objectively did not deliver. Can you imagine how the people of Tuggeranong would feel if we just kind of let the whole thing slide? Can you imagine how that would make them feel

about politics? So frankly, I do not think any of us should be silent when our electors are this miffed.

To the second set of amendments, if the question is that they are considered together, we are supportive in principle of the amendments to change the timeframe—foreshadowing that the Greens will be moving our own amendments which call for broader community consultation. We do not think that the extra consultation will happen unless the timeframe is pushed out a little bit. So that is our justification, and we will see how this resolves in practice.

MS TOUGH (Brindabella—Minister for Human Rights, Minister for Community Services, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Women, Seniors and Veterans, and Minister for the Prevention of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence) (4.37): I rise to speak in favour of both of Mr Steel's amendments, as a proud member for Brindabella—a proud member who was part of a team who knocked on tens of thousands of doors to develop the plan for Tuggeranong, and a proud member of the government who is delivering that plan: delivering things that range from Sulwood Drive improvements, shop upgrades, pool upgrades, playground upgrades, female-friendly change rooms across sporting grounds, and upgrades to the Tuggeranong Arts Centre; a wide range of upgrades across our community.

And if we look through the list of sporting promises in this motion—I will not go through everything like Minister Steel did—and we check it against the great tracker that my colleague Mr Werner-Gibbings has on his website, we can see how many of them are complete or in progress. In fact, it looks like only one on the list is still to start. But not only looking at that list, if we look at the whole plan for Tuggeranong tracker that Mr Werner-Gibbings has put together, there is a total of 67 items on that list. Thirty-five have been delivered, 22 have been funded or are in progress, with only 10 outstanding. I think that is a pretty good record for this point in the term, for our plan—with 67 items and only 10 currently outstanding.

Since last week's announcement—which is completely disappointing to me—I have spoken to many, many residents of Tuggeranong and some sports clubs about what investing the \$16.265 million into sporting clubs across Tuggeranong looks like. And I know quite a few clubs with ideas ready to go, who have told or are in the process of telling the government those ideas of how that money can be invested into their clubs and into our community. And I know my colleague Mr Werner-Gibbings has had many conversations too, and has set up a survey to collect ideas from clubs and the communities to pass on to Minister Steel about what can be done as part of community consultation.

So, I appreciate Miss Nuttall's forthcoming amendments around community consultation and that is why I support Mr Steel's amendment about pushing out the timeframe.

I know that my colleague Mr Werner-Gibbings would be very disappointed not to be here today, and I am sure a lot of the chamber is disappointed that he is not here today to be part of this debate. I am sorry I will not do justice to channelling him into my debate speech, but I am sure he will read the Hansard on his return and tell me all the things I could have said that he would have liked to get on the record.

But I will say we are both extremely disappointed. We have had so many conversations sharing our disappointment with each other, and what we have heard from our community since the announcement. So, I am not going to shy away from that disappointment that we share; disappointment the new ice rink is not going ahead in Tuggeranong or even anywhere, at this time. We both had a lot of conversations with the Ice Sports Federation around what the Tuggeranong rink would have looked like and what a new rink looks like, and we are both on the record for supporting a petition that Mr Werner-Gibbings sponsored for the Ice Sports Federation. I do not think it would be a shock to anyone to know that we are disappointed.

But I think what we can all agree on is that the idea of it being in Tuggeranong was not a secret during any of the discussions with potential developers. The money on the table was not unknown. People did not walk in not knowing what was on the table from government. So, it is disappointing for our community that, with all that information on the table, the developer was not able to go ahead. We have also seen, related to the same developer, promises in Adelaide of a new rink that never happened either. So, when my colleagues tell me there were unacceptable risks of this agreement going ahead, I believe them.

Going back to the timeframe, the motion wants us, by the end of next month, to list all the projects to be funded with the \$16.265 million. But unless the opposition wants us to captain's pick those projects—and do not get me wrong, I have many ideas of where that money could go and I am sure, if you let me just pick, I could easily find different clubs and different sporting things to put it through, but I am not sure everyone would agree with my options and you know, that is life—but that is why we are having a survey so everyone gets a chance to put in those ideas. So, it is not just Minister Tough's \$16 million of spending, it is for the community to have their input, for us to look at projects and get that feedback from sporting clubs in the community and assess them properly.

I want to see that money out the door and work started and completed as soon as possible. But I am realistic about the timeframe for having a transparent and accountable process, and needing a bit of time to do that and talk to the community and the clubs and make sure that money goes where it needs to go. So, I will be working really closely with my colleague Mr Werner-Gibbings and, I am sure, other colleagues from across Brindabella and with Minister Steel about how and where the money is invested in our Tuggeranong sporting community.

I wanted also to thank Mr Steel for his engagement, and the previous minister, Ms Berry for her engagement on investment in sporting clubs and sporting facilities across Tuggeranong. I know Ms Berry is a huge champion of getting female-friendly change rooms across sporting facilities across the ACT. Part of our plan for Tuggeranong has been developing female-friendly facilities in the ACT and Tuggeranong. I have seen some of them at different clubs and I think it is wonderful that we have been putting that in and encouraging women's sport. I hope that maybe some of this money can go to more female-friendly change rooms and encouraging more women into sport.

I also wanted to reflect that recently Minister Steel and I went to a charity day at the

Tuggeranong United football club. One of the women's players tragically died earlier this year, and the club has had a partnership with Lifeline to raise money for Lifeline and bring awareness to mental health and the importance of community sport in supporting each other. They hope that this was the first of many years of a partnership between Lifeline and Tuggeranong United, and I really hope it is. It was a fantastic day, tinged by some sadness, and it was wonderful to meet the player's family while I was there and talk to them about how incredible a woman she was and how much she meant to her teammates and her family—but also how important community sport is in bringing us together and supporting each other in the community. And while we were there, the club, of course, took advantage of having two ministers at the club to say, “Hey, these are all the projects that we could do here at Tuggeranong United to improve women's participation, to improve our facilities generally, to work closely with some of the other sports that use some of the Kambah and Wanniasa facilities.”

I am sure Tuggeranong United is one of many clubs that will be putting in ideas to this survey. I know Brindabella Blues in Calwell have many ideas of things that can be done to support more women's participation in sport, to make it safer and more accessible for umpires and officials at sporting fields and grow the sport more generally. So, I support Mr Steel's amendments.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (4.45): I rise in support of this motion. I do not support Minister Steel's first amendment but I do support his second amendment and Miss Nuttall's amendment. At its heart, this debate is about accountability. The government made a clear election commitment to deliver a new ice sports facility in Tuggeranong. That commitment was made repeatedly. Cancellation of the Tuggeranong ice rink is deeply disappointing for the ice sports community and for Tuggeranong residents more broadly. After years of promises, people deserve transparency about what happened and what comes next. That is why the reporting requirements in this motion are so important.

The government should table the status and funding for the election commitments and provide an additional \$16.2 million for the cancellation of the ice rink. Sixteen million dollars should not become a mechanism to rebadge, backfill or replace funding for projects that were already promised. I support Miss Nuttall's amendment requiring meaningful community consultation on the allocation of the additional \$16 million. The government has said that the money will remain in Tuggeranong. If that is the case, Tuggeranong residents should have a genuine say in determining the projects that receive that investment. I also support the requirement that these projects be fully appropriated in the 2027 budget with clear delivery schedules. Communities have seen too many announcements without certainty about funding or delivery. If the government is serious about retaining this investment in Tuggeranong, it should be reflected transparently in the budget papers and backed by a clear implementation plan.

The motion also raises an important question about the future of ice sports in the ACT. While the Tuggeranong ice rink may have been abandoned, the need for a competition-standard ice sports facility has not disappeared. Phillip ice rink remains the only publicly accessible ice sports facility in Canberra. It is vital that the government works with the owners to ensure it remains safe, operational and accessible. More broadly, now that the rink is no longer proposed for Tuggeranong, the government should actively consider options for retaining ice sports in Woden, whether that involves the

existing Phillip site or identifying an alternative location nearby. The original commitment by the government was that the ice rink would stay on the south side.

This motion is ultimately about keeping promises, being transparent when commitments change, consulting the community on major decisions and ensuring public money is invested openly and accountably.

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (4.48): I will keep my comments fairly brief. Here again we are talking about a government that has changed its position. In 2016, the Labor Party declared unambiguously that they were going to deliver a twin-sheet ice rink in Tuggeranong—absolutely no room for any doubt; that is what the government was committed to delivering. But I am afraid, Mr Speaker, I do not believe that. I do not believe they were ever committed to delivering that facility in that location.

The reason I do not believe that is because in 2018 the now minister, Minister Steel, was attending a Woden Community Council forum and he was pressed fairly solidly by the then chair, Ms Carrick, about why Woden was going to lose its facility. It was unambiguous from Minister Steel—and I sent Mr Milligan a text message after that: “Chris Steel very clearly implied that the new ice rink may not indeed be in Tuggeranong; simply that it would be somewhere in Canberra’s south”—7 November 2018.

So very shortly after the election where Labor had promised to deliver an ice rink in Tuggeranong, already we had the government casting doubt on whether they were ever actually committed to that location. Perhaps Mr Steel felt under pressure, but in no way at that meeting was he willing to commit to Tuggeranong. It really does beg the question: did this government ever intend to keep that promise? Which promise is next? Which area is next? Where are they going to walk away from next?

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (4.51): I will speak to the motion and the amendments together. First, I should apologise for the procedural confusion. I just wanted to be sure we could vote on the amendments differently. I was not intending to block the minister from moving them at all. So apologies. I am glad we will be able to. I thank Mr Milligan and Mrs Morris for bringing this motion forward—it makes absolute sense that they have done so—with some very sensible calls to ensure that new government commitments are followed through. That is my read of the motion—not just reflecting on prior government commitments that have not come to fruition, but ensuring the commitment of additional funding to Tuggeranong is actually a commitment of additional funding.

The amendment from Mr Steel, shifting the timeline for the separate investment process plan, makes a lot of sense to me. When I read the motion, I figured that would get amended to a later date. Obviously, it is important for those decisions to be made in collaboration and consultation with the Tuggeranong community per Miss Nuttall’s amendment. So those together make a lot of sense to me.

The minister’s other amendment seeking to remove the agreement or the call for this Assembly to condemn the government for breaking its repeated promise to deliver a new ice sports facility in Tuggeranong is not one I can support. It is not so much, though, because of the failure to deliver on the project, but because I think this needs to be a

lesson in the kinds of commitments that get made. We have seen this repeatedly. The Tuggeranong Ice Sports Facility is one example of making an announcement—and if you are expecting people to read the fine print and check what the terms and conditions are on the announcement of a new ice rink coming to Tuggeranong, you do not see them on an Instagram post or in the headline of the article and you might not see them in the body either. The expectation, clearly, was that a new facility would be delivered, but it appears that that announcement was made before it was determined that this was actually feasible. I do not think that is appropriate. The feasibility of a project and the appropriateness of a site for a proposed project should be guaranteed to the greatest extent possible before the announcement is made.

Surely this is a lesson we can learn, not just from this project but also from the proposed home of football in Throsby where a similar problem occurred. A home of football was announced on a site that, it turns out, could not cater for such a facility, could not cater for such grounds. In that case, the partner, Capital Football, also pulled out of that proposal and said, “We cannot do this”. It is slightly different in this case: the government pulling out because of conditions presented by the private partner that made it unfeasible. But let’s not make the announcements before we know if it is possible to deliver. That is not how we carry on in our personal lives—“I am going to lose 20 kilos in the next month, and I will figure out later how that is possible.” These are not the sorts of things that we do—Mr Hanson thinks maybe it is possible; we will see—and I do not think governments should do them either. We have spoken a lot in this place about trust in public institutions, trust in democracy and trust in politicians, all of which are going down, and these are the sorts of reasons that that occurs.

There is another project in my electorate, the new Canberra Aquatic Centre. The government selected a site, made an announcement together with their federal colleagues and said, “We are going to build an amazing new aquatic centre on the site, and here is the funding envelope.” So they make the announcement, “This is the project; this is the funding envelope”—it is a big figure, so everyone gets excited—and then later said, “We cannot actually to build a diving pool on that site now that we have had a look at it, because the site is inappropriate and the funding is insufficient.” They have selected the site and selected the funding envelope, so what is the basis of the commitment—just Google Maps and figuring, “That looks like it could fit a pool,” and then making the announcement? I do not think it cuts the mustard.

So I think it is appropriate that we condemn this failure, because it is a broken promise and it is part of the pattern of making promises before being confident that they can actually be fulfilled. I hope on the back of this and a string of several examples that that pattern changes.

MR PARTON (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (4.55): I am sorry I missed most of the party, but I wanted to rise today in support of the motion from Mr Milligan and Mrs Morris. I thank them for their work in bringing this incredibly important motion to the Assembly today. I am the longest-serving member of Brindabella in this parliament, as of today.

Ms Tough: As of today?

MR PARTON: Yes. Ms Tough was looking at me, and she was about to get into me—

but, as of today, I am the longest-serving. I am the one who has been serving the people of Tuggeranong longer than any other member of this current Assembly. I

was first elected to this place as a member for Brindabella in 2016 on a mission to represent the community. Funnily enough, that was the very same election where ACT Labor first promised to deliver an ice sport facility in Tuggeranong. In 2020 I ran again and luckily—I think it was luck more than anything else—I was elected for a second term and, surprise, ACT Labor were promising, “We are going to build this ice rink. It is a great idea and we care about Tuggeranong.” I am not sure that they do. In 2024, I ran again and snuck in—getting in by the skin of my teeth for a third term—and again ACT Labor promised to deliver an ice rink in Tuggeranong. I still believe—and certainly based on the conversations that I have had in Tuggeranong—that most people at that point did not believe that it was going to be delivered. They just did not.

Unfortunately, when Minister Steel fronted the media last Monday and admitted that ACT Labor were failing to deliver on yet again another election commitment, I was not surprised and most people were not. One decade after I was first elected and a decade after ACT Labor promised an ice rink in Tuggeranong, there is no rink, there is no workable contract and most certainly no facility. We got the announcement about Big Splash—“We are going to go out and talk to people and ask them what they want”—and I just wonder if we will end up with a big splash and a big freeze. I do not know; I am just putting it out there. I do not know how many elections were had where it was decided that that would be promised, but we are getting to the point, unfortunately, where people are just not believing.

I think one of the biggest reasons for this motion to come forward is that, sure, Labor, through the sports minister, have come out and pledged that that \$16 million will go to sports infrastructure in Tuggeranong, and this was our way of saying, “Don’t you dare just rebadge things that were already there. Don’t you dare channel this money into things that you were going to do anyway and then pat yourself on the back for doing it.” This motion is not about politics; it is about the people of Tuggeranong. It is about making sure that they are heard and that they receive the investment that they well and truly deserve, and I thank Mr Milligan and Mrs Morris for bringing this motion to the Assembly today.

MRS MORRIS (Brindabella) (4.58): The Canberra Liberals will not be supporting the minister’s first amendment. This is a matter of accountability, integrity and maintaining public confidence in our democratic processes. Canberrans should be able to trust that, if their government says they are going to do something, that they will deliver on it, and as an Assembly it is important that we uphold this principle. We need to send a message that, when the government break an election commitment, they are held to account for that.

Ordered that the question be divided.

Mr Steel’s amendment No 1 negatived.

Mr Steel’s amendment No 2 agreed to.

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (5.00), by leave: I move the amendments circulated in

my name:

- “(3)(d) develop a mechanism that ensures the broader Tuggeranong community is meaningfully consulted on the allocation of the \$16.265 million;
- (e) work with the owners of the Phillip Ice Rink to ensure it remains safe, operational and accessible to the community as the sole ice sports facility in Canberra available for community use, at least until a new competition-standard, publicly accessible facility is fully operational; and
- (f) develop a plan for the future of ice sports facilities in the ACT.”.

I would just like a moment to particularly thank Mrs Morris and Mr Steel and their offices for their productive engagement and good-faith negotiations as well as the Milligan and Carrick offices for their engagement too.

In the interests of time I will speak to both the motion and my amendments now. Today we are rising in support of the motion on the now-cancelled development of the Tuggeranong Ice Sports Facility. I do have a couple of amendments that expand on their original calls to hopefully give the ice sports community and particularly those in Tuggeranong some answers and ensure extensive consultation on the funding when it is appropriated. I will talk to those in more detail in a moment.

It is safe to say Tuggeranong residents and ice sports fans alike are pretty disappointed. Those in the centre of the Venn diagram are quite livid. We have listened to 10 years of election commitments and promises, all to have made no progress whatsoever. The Olympic-standard twin sheet ice facility was intended to be the home of the Canberra Brave—I would hope that the Pirates would also get a look-in—and host up to 3,600 people. It would have been our first speed climbing wall in the ACT and the only facility with any kind of top rope climbing too. Putting such a major development and highly sought after facility in Tuggeranong’s town centre was a headline commitment for Tuggeranong from ACT Labor over three election cycles, and the community was very excited to see it built. Although, after being told it was coming for 10 years but not seeing anything many lost hope, and sadly in this case they were right.

We have been asking for updates on the project for years, and year on year the government has continued to assure us that they were committed to running this facility in Tuggeranong. In many ways the announcement that the government had walked back on their commitment has not come as a big shock since there have been so many delays and concerns. We have asked questions of the government on how private proponents won the EOI when they had never successfully delivered an ice rink and why government thought that they would be successful this time. We have wondered why the government only sent draft project documentation in 2025 when the money was committed in 2022. All of these questions were answered with the reassurance that the government was committed to building this facility in Tuggeranong and the private proponents just had to come to the table.

Now, in September 2026, the government has announced that the project will not proceed due to the proponents seeking more than double the original investment from the ACT government. The ACT government assessed that the proposal was no longer value for money for the territory. This is one in a long history of sports, recreation and

community facilities tanking because the ACT government has ultimately ended up at the whims of private investment and private interest. This is what happens when we leave our supplience of sports and recreation facilities to the private market. We have already lost our competition-standard bowling facility in Tuggeranong. We are waiting on Big Splash to reopen.

I am reassured that the minister is committed to investing that \$16 million for Tuggeranong, and I would hope that this money goes to a new community-backed initiative—several. We have been told that the government used the Sport and Active Recreation Infrastructure Survey to help inform where this money will be spent. While I think this is a good start, I am worried that only pre-existing sports and recreation groups will be able to participate. The Tuggeranong community broadly does not appear to have a say on the kinds of sports and recreation facilities they would like to see. The whole point of having an ice rink was that it was great not just for competitive ice sports athletes but as a turn-up-and-skate venue for the Tuggeranong community and our visitors. I expect that the same Tuggeranong who was promised an ice rink would want the money to go to another project that they could publicly access. Government has also acknowledged that it is really hard to compare needs between the sports. Last time, in 2023, the survey asked every organisation to rank their priorities. That did not help government weigh up different first-priority projects.

That leads me into my amendments. I have proposed inserting three additional calls. We want to call on the government to develop a mechanism that ensures that the broader Tuggeranong community be meaningfully consulted on the allocation of the \$16 million. Instead of a narrow survey we want the ACT government to run a proper consultation process that genuinely takes into account the Tuggeranong community's sport and recreation needs. This could look like anything. It could be a YourSay survey, it could be a series of workshops and drop-in centres or something else entirely, but at the very least it should tell the community what is currently available, it should be open to anyone who lives, works, studies or hangs out in Tuggeranong and it should be able to demonstrate at the end that the sports and recreation projects were funded as a result of this genuine consultation.

We are also calling on the government to ensure that the Phillip ice rink remains safe, operational and accessible to the community as the sole ice sports facility in Canberra available for community use, because it is all we have got. It is not competition standard. It makes it hard when casual and premier teams like the Pirates are having to train from 10.30 pm and finish at midnight, but right now it is the destination for anyone who loves ice sports. We need that facility to stay online because otherwise pretty much everyone but the Brave loses access to ice sports in the ACT. That is also why it is so important that the government develops a plan for the future of ice sports facilities in the ACT.

While the minister has promised to invest the same amount government would have spent on the ice rink into other Tuggeranong sports and recreation projects, all the competitive ice athletes and social skaters are back to square one. The one permanent ice sports facility we have in Canberra is not competition standard, and it is so small that all the user groups have to compete for space. Right now ice sports are growing. It is hard when we are asking everyone to share a small facility that is not competition standard yet. I was chatting to a friend, and they had to run two heats for their social entry-level hockey team because over 60 people had applied. Curling is taking off.

Government does not have any funding earmarked for building or upgrading ice sport facilities across Canberra right now.

While the ACT's community, recreation and sports facilities needs assessment and social infrastructure audit is fairly detailed—like the name—there is not much work on ice sports, and most of it assumed that the Tuggeranong facility would proceed. There has not been a good needs analysis for ice sports in the ACT, and we think government should be prepared to do one for the Tuggeranong residents who are really excited and for everyone who loves ice sports. Once government has gauged the demand for ice sports, we think they should make a call on whether they upgrade Phillip or establish a new facility elsewhere.

I do remain concerned that in an effort to establish a competition-standard facility the government's own procurement process might not rule out the proponents behind the Tuggeranong ice rink. I would be concerned if the process returned a preference for private investors who more than doubled their asking price for the last option. The community might reasonably ask us, "Are the proponents able to deliver a facility?"—they did last time—and, "Should this developer even be rewarded with another project when quotes might blow out or be delayed for another 10 years?"

Ultimately I have to represent my community. I am frustrated for them. I personally was looking forward to going on the ice and climbing the walls. The number of constituents I have talked to that were excited for a facility in Tuggeranong and excited for Canberrans outside of Tuggeranong to travel down and see how great Tuggeranong is—which they should anyway because Tuggeranong is the best. I have also talked to many constituents who were sceptical of the project and did not think the Labor government could deliver. Sadly, they were right in this case, and it only adds to the sentiment that government does not deliver on projects in Tuggeranong, but hopefully they have an opportunity to do it right this time.

Miss Nuttall's amendments agreed to.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

MRS MORRIS: I just say thank you very much for the contributions from all members and particularly Miss Nuttall and the Greens. I do also thank the minister for his contribution.

Order of business—postponement

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

That orders of the day Nos 6 and 7, Assembly business be postponed until a later hour this day.

Social Policy—Standing Committee Report 6

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (5.11): I present the following report:

Social Policy—Standing Committee—Report 6—*Inquiry into E-Petition 077-25, access to 11-12 ATAR language courses in 2026*, dated 30 June 2026, together with extracts of the relevant minutes of proceedings.

This report was circulated to members, pursuant to standing order 254C.

I move:

That the report be noted.

This is the sixth report of the Standing Committee on Social Policy for the Eleventh Assembly. The committee began this self-referred inquiry on 5 March 2026. Submissions closed on 10 April 2026. A public hearing was held on 28 April 2026.

Our report makes seven findings about the lack of continuous language learning pathways for ACT public school students across the three levels of schooling—primary school, high school and college. The report makes eight recommendations, which focus on ways to strengthen and improve language learning pathways so that more students can develop deep language competency and continue their studies through to the years 11 to 12 ATAR standard.

The committee recognises the community interest in this inquiry and appreciates the participation of students, teachers, parents and education providers in sharing both their experiences and their love of language learning. We heard of the wider benefits and range of opportunities that arise for students when they can develop high levels of language fluency and competency.

On behalf of the committee I would like to thank the Minister for Education and Early Childhood, officials and all witnesses for their participation in this inquiry. I also thank my fellow committee members who participated in this inquiry: our deputy chair Ms Barry, Miss Nuttall and former committee member Ms Tough.

I commend the report to the Assembly. I would also like to add some of my own remarks as an independent member not speaking on behalf of the committee. A high-quality and diverse public education landscape is core to Canberra's identity. We all know this. It is something that we celebrate and speak about a lot, and it is the reason that many people choose to raise children here—and even for people who have grown up here, moved away and come back this is one of the reasons. As the nation's capital, with a significant international and diplomatic workforce, the Education Directorate's apparent lack of support for language education does not meet community expectations—this was clear through the inquiry—nor does it support Canberra's future workforce needs and opportunities. We are home to embassies, high commissions and commonwealth agencies that deploy staff overseas to advance Australia's interests. Beyond this, language education gives children and families a meaningful way to connect to language, of course, and also to culture.

I will touch on some of the report findings around the lack of continuous equitable language learning pathways here in the ACT. We learned that 19 schools from years 3 to 8 had no language offering at all. This is despite languages education being part of the Australian curriculum, which means a significant proportion of public schools in

the ACT are not following the national curriculum. We need to see leadership that ensures students in the ACT have the same access—or better—to language learning opportunities in our public schools as those in non-government schools. As much as we might not want to talk about it, multiple members have heard direct accounts—this came up in the inquiry—from parents who have chosen to take their children out of government schools and to move them to non-government schools because of the language learning options.

In response to an estimates question the new education minister confirmed that language education is the only area of noncompliance relating to the implementation of the Australian curriculum in ACT public schools, so this is something that should be focused on and addressed. Too often it is viewed as an optional extra, and at some stages it is an elective, but in some years it is not; it is core curriculum and needs to be delivered.

The government has a *Language Education Action Plan*, which came up during the inquiry. The reason this inquiry was launched to begin with was because of one of the actions under that plan not being delivered fundamentally. It was the loss of the centralised language learning program for years 11 and 12 students in the ACT. Action 4 in the action plan is to explore options for alternative delivery models for public school language education programs, including online delivery, which will provide flexible and innovative solutions for students wishing to undertake a pathway for proficiency. This was set to be completed by 2025, but instead at the end of 2025 we had fewer alternative delivery models for public school language education programs.

Then when the *Language Education Action Plan* was launched our communities called for the directorate to step up—acknowledging this was provided by a private provider, but then by CIT, which is publicly funded, of course—and do this. Almost every other jurisdiction in Australia has a dedicated external senior secondary language offering. In multiple other states that program is run by the government. This is something that our community also called for in the petition leading to this inquiry. Within two years of launching the *Language Education Action Plan* the now former education minister said in hearings that language education was not a priority right now. What is the point of the plan? It is very confusing.

On the centralised offering that has been lost, there is still time for the government to step in and decide to deliver this and do the right thing. It is a sensible model. It is a valuable offering for many reasons. One is that without it there is no ATAR-level Tamil offering in the ACT anymore. This was providing that solution for students. More broadly, it does make sense to gather students together to learn a language that may not be available in their home college where the economies of scale do not exist for their language of choice. This makes sense for students, but it also makes sense financially. It strengthens the continuity of language learning pathways across the territory. It is incredibly cost-effective compared to alternatives because you are gathering students together in the same place once a week to learn their languages of choice rather than requiring their teachers to move between different schools to reach those students or attempting to provide those languages in every school, which of course would not be possible. It also provides an opportunity for teachers to supplement their income by teaching after-hours, if that is something they choose to do. The experience with private providers that have offered this program indicates that it is something they want to do and are eager to do, and we heard from some of those teachers during the hearings.

It is still unclear why exactly the government decided not to step up and take over the delivery of the centralised language learning program for students in the ACT like multiple other governments across the country have done, but cost was one reason that was given. The social policy committee then learned that the Education Directorate's cost estimate for running this program of over \$500,000 per year was 2½ to almost 4½ times higher than the costs provided by the two organisations that have actually run this program before in the ACT. The government's costings included a full-time program manager on more than \$200,000 a year, plus a part-time admin support officer on \$67,000 per year. It is a pretty simple program. Language lessons are being provided just once per week, with the same group of students taught by the same teachers at the same location and at the same time every single week. How could that require a full-time program manager on more than \$200,000 a year supported by a part-time admin support officer?

The Canberra Academy of Languages, who has provided this program, provided a total costing of \$206,000 a year to deliver the program with six teachers for six languages. Their total costing for the program was equivalent just to the one senior program manager role in the ACT government's costing. For that role the Canberra Academy of Languages estimated they would just need someone working 0.1 FTE, which would cost \$14,500 under their costing. CIT indicated—because this year they are delivering this program; it is the final year—they are doing so for \$124,000 in total, which is less than that individual role.

I raised this during estimates. How could it be that someone would be required to work full time for a class that happens once a week?—not to teach it, by the way. These are not the teachers. This is the person running the program. I have got people in my office thinking that if that is a job they can get, they are going to leave because that is a lot less work for more money than they are earning. Officials said they would use their standard scoping processes for public service positions to calculate these costings. Now I am really concerned, because how many roles are there across the directorate where someone is receiving that amount of money for that level of work and where the costing is so different from what has been demonstrated that can be delivered in the private sector or by other organisations like CIT.

I did learn a little bit more about that through a ministerial response to a question on notice, which said the program manager component of the costings comprises a salary and on-costs for a school leader C position. The directorate considered other comparable government-run programs and initiatives to determine estimated resourcing requirements and associated costings, noting the directorate has never delivered a centralised standalone program such as this before. They indicated that a program manager would be required to manage all aspects of the program, which included establishing it in accordance with the ACT BSSS requirements; program and staff timetabling; coordination of student enrolments with each student's home school; management of student fees and program budget; human resource management, including recruitment and management of staff absences; program promotion and reporting; stakeholder engagement; management of compliance responsibilities; financial management; emergency management et cetera. I just want to reiterate—you read that list and go, "Okay, that kind of makes sense"—this is one class per week with the same students and teachers every week, and if a teacher gets sick, you can find a

replacement. Other organisations have said they can do this and they have demonstrated they can do it at a far lower cost. Our committee has recommended that the government either do it themselves or contract another organisation to do it if they cannot do it at a reasonable cost.

All of that is to say I look forward to the government's response on this and I hope that they will change their minds and decide that it is right to provide this centralised program, because it is a sensible way of addressing some of the gaps in the continuous and equitable language learning pathways and the delivery of the national curriculum that we identified during our inquiry.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Legal Affairs—Standing Committee Report 10

MS BARRY (Ginninderra) (5.22): I present the following report:

Legal Affairs—Standing Committee—Report 10—*Inquiry into the Bail Amendment Bill 2026*, dated 26 August 2026, together with extracts of the relevant minutes of proceedings.

This report was circulated to members, pursuant to standing order 254C.

I move:

That the report be noted.

This is the 10th report of the Standing Committee on Legal Affairs for the Eleventh Assembly. This inquiry commenced on 13 May 2026. The committee received 18 submissions to the inquiry across a number of stakeholder groups and heard from 22 witnesses. The committee makes 15 recommendations.

On behalf of the committee I would like to thank all who made submissions to the inquiry and who participated in the public hearings. I thank the other members of the committee Mr Werner-Gibbings and Ms Vassarotti. I commend the report to the Assembly.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Report 11

MS BARRY (Ginninderra) (5.23): I present the following report:

Legal Affairs—Standing Committee—Report 10—*Inquiry into the Crimes (Coercive Control) Amendment Bill 2026*, dated 10 September 2026, together with extracts of the relevant minutes of proceedings.

This report was circulated to members, pursuant to standing order 254C.

I move:

That the report be noted.

This is the 11th report of the Standing Committee on Legal Affairs for the Eleventh Assembly. This inquiry commenced on 3 June 2026. The committee received 31 submissions to the inquiry from a broad range of stakeholders, including community organisations, advocacy groups and individuals with lived experience. The committee makes 15 recommendations aimed at strengthening the bill and supporting its effective implementation.

On behalf of the committee I would like to thank everyone who made submissions to the inquiry and participated in the public hearings. In particular I acknowledge those who generously and courageously shared their lived experience with the committee. Their contributions provided valuable insights into the impacts of coercive control and have informed the committee's consideration of the issues raised during the inquiry. I thank the other members of the committee Mr Werner-Gibbings and Ms Vassarotti. I commend the report to the Assembly

MS VASSAROTTI (Kurrajong) (5.25): I just wanted to make a couple of comments regarding this inquiry and speak in support of the report into the bill. I want to note that the issues raised through this inquiry were significant, and I am really hoping that the government will meaningfully engage with the recommendations to further improve the legislation in a way that we can be confident that this legislation will see progress in relation to our response to domestic and family violence.

I too wanted to particularly thank the victim-survivors who contributed to this inquiry. The decision to come forward and speak about something that is so deeply personal, traumatic and life impacting is incredibly courageous, and deliberations were enriched by this testimony. I wanted to particularly note that a number of people came forward after media reporting that there was only one such submission. While these additional submissions came in late to the inquiry, I wanted to note that they were important and shaped where the recommendations landed.

This is an area of law that is evolving and is still relatively new. Even though we have seen the introduction of this type of legislation in a number of other states, what we can learn from these early legislative moves is the need to ensure that this type of legislation moves beyond symbolism and provides a real avenue for victim-survivors to be better protected and achieve justice. That is why one of the key recommendations of the inquiry's report was to seriously consider the issue of recklessness and how to incorporate this into the fault provisions of the legislation.

New South Wales is a good test case on the need to look at this issue, and we are seeing recommendations coming out of the evaluation process that this is an area of their scheme that needs to be looked at. We also heard from submitters about the importance to be clear about definitions and issues such as reasonableness. All of these issues would be of great value to the government to consider in the finalisation of the legislation.

It is really vital that the government works with key groups, particularly First Nations groups and people from culturally diverse backgrounds and other areas, and ensures that they are involved in the advisory committee, because they have a key role to play

both prior to and in the implementation phase. Having a robust evaluation framework will also be key.

I really commend the government for putting forward this important piece of legislation and thank everyone who engaged with the inquiry. This is where parliament works best: when people come together to look at something that is new and innovative and draw on experience. I really look forward to hearing from the government as they respond to the inquiry report and finalise the legislation for us to debate in future Assembly sittings.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Economics, Industry and Recreation—Standing Committee

Statement by deputy chair

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (5.29): Pursuant to standing order 246A, I make this statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Economics, Industry and Recreation relating to a new inquiry.

Pursuant to standing order 216, the committee has resolved to inquire into governance arrangements at CIT.

The committee will consider and report on the appropriateness of the governance arrangements at CIT, including the operation and effectiveness of the governing body; sufficiency of ministerial accountability and parliamentary oversight; the effectiveness of CIT's risk, assurance and integrity frameworks and potential opportunities; and risks and impacts for governance improvements, including: maintaining the CIT Board, a reduced independence governance structure and a merger with the University of Canberra.

The scope of the inquiry will also include comparisons with best practice in governance of tertiary institutions.

Submissions for this inquiry are open until Friday, 30 October 2026, and the committee hopes to hear from a wide range of stakeholders.

Environment and Planning—Standing Committee

Statement by chair

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (5.30): Pursuant to standing order 246A, I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Environment and Planning in relation to E-PET-008-26 and PET-030-26 concerning the Hawker Tennis Club and E-PET-004-26 and PET-020-26 concerning Save Big Splash.

The Hawker Tennis Club petitions, with a total of 1,265 signatories, were transferred to the committee from the Standing Committee on Economics, Industry and Recreation on 5 June 2026. These petitions drew the Assembly's attention to the derelict state of the former Hawker Tennis Centre on block 9, section 3 in Hawker and called for the termination of the existing Crown lease, the return of the site to public ownership and the reservation of the land for sport and recreation purposes.

The Save Big Splash petitions, with a total of 7,390 signatories, were referred to the committee on 25 February 2026 and highlighted community concerns regarding the ongoing closure of Big Splash water park in Macquarie and called on the ACT government to end the existing Crown lease, return the site to public ownership and redevelop it as a community aquatic and recreation facility.

After careful consideration of the petitions and the government's responses, the committee has resolved not to undertake separate inquiries into these matters at this time. However, the committee recognises that they raise broader issues regarding the use of controlled activity orders to enforce compliance with lease conditions in the ACT and considers these issues worthy of further examination.

Accordingly, on 6 July 2026, the committee commenced a new self-referred inquiry into the use of controlled activity orders. The inquiry seeks to examine the effectiveness of compliance and enforcement mechanisms within the ACT planning system and whether improvements to the current framework are warranted.

The committee is seeking evidence regarding the use of controlled activity orders in relation to the Big Splash and Hawker Tennis Centre sites, as well as a number of other sites that have attracted significant community interest. These include the Gungahlin cinema, the Phillip swimming pool and ice skating centre, the Manuka hotel on the old Capitol Theatre site, the Brindabella Christian College car park, the Richardson shops and any other relevant sites.

Submissions for this inquiry closed on 28 August 2026, and public hearings will be held in October 2026. Following the completion of its inquiry, the committee will report its findings and any recommendations to the Assembly.

Integrity Commission and Statutory Office Holders—Standing Committee

Statement by chair

MS LEE (Kurrajong) (5.33): Pursuant to standing order 246A, I make this statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on the Integrity Commission and Statutory Office Holders relating to a new inquiry.

Pursuant to standing order 216, the committee has resolved to inquire into electoral representation in the ACT. The committee notes the recommendations of the Latimer House Principles in the Australian Capital Territory review report and in particular recommendation 30, relating to the size of the Assembly. The committee has also consulted with the Speaker and ascertained that the Standing Committee on Administration and Procedure will not be inquiring into the size of the Assembly.

The committee has resolved to examine electoral representation more broadly in the ACT with reference to:

1. The number of Members of the Legislative Assembly required for adequate and fair representation of the people of the Territory;
2. The number of Members of the Legislative Assembly required for effective scrutiny of the ACT Government and proposed legislation;

3. The number of Ministers required to effectively administer the Territory;
4. The potential for an upper House in the ACT;
5. The potential for the establishment of local councils;
6. The financial and parliamentary infrastructure impact of a potential increase in the number of elected Members; and
7. any other relevant matter.

Submissions to the inquiry will close on 30 October 2026.

Public Accounts and Administration—Standing Committee

Statement by deputy chair

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (5.34): Pursuant to standing order 246A, I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts and Administration relating to a new inquiry.

On Monday, 24 August, the committee agreed to terms of reference for a self-referred inquiry into the Secure Local Jobs Code. The committee has called for submissions and intends to hold a public hearing on Monday, 2 November 2026. We expect to table a report before the end of the year.

Submissions for this inquiry are open until Tuesday, 6 October 2026. The committee hopes to hear from a range of stakeholders including employers, businesses, community groups and non-profit organisations.

Economics, Industry and Recreation—Standing Committee

Statement by deputy chair

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (5.35): Pursuant to standing order 246A, I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Economics, Industry and Recreation relating to statutory appointments, in accordance with continuing resolution 5A.

During the reporting period 1 January to 31 June 2026 the Standing Committee on Economics, Industry and Recreation considered a total of five appointments and reappointments to the following bodies:

- ACT Building and Construction Industry Training Fund Authority
- ACT Long Service Authority Governing Board
- Canberra Institute of Technology Board

I now table a schedule of statutory appointments considered during this reporting period:

Economics, Industry and Recreation—Standing Committee—Schedule of
Statutory Appointments—11th Assembly—Period 1 January to 31 June 2026.

Economics, Industry and Recreation—Standing Committee

Statement by deputy chair

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (5.36): Pursuant to standing order 246A, I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts and Administration relating to statutory appointments, in accordance with continuing resolution 5A.

During the reporting period 1 January to 30 June 2026 the Eleventh Assembly Standing Committee on Public Accounts and Administration considered a total of two appointments and reappointments to the following bodies:

- the Icon Water Board, and
- the Government Procurement Board.

I now table a schedule of statutory appointments considered during this reporting period:

Public Accounts and Administration—Standing Committee—Schedule of Statutory Appointments—11th Assembly—Period 1 January to 31 June 2026.

Social Policy—Standing Committee Statement by chair

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (5.37): Pursuant to standing order 246A, I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Social Policy relating to statutory appointments, in accordance with continuing resolution 5A.

During the reporting period 1 January 2026 to 30 June 2026 the committee considered a total of 16 appointments and reappointments to the following bodies:

- ACT Official Visitors;
- The Registration Standards Advisory Board;
- ACT Board of Senior Secondary Studies;
- ACT Teacher Quality Institute of Board; and
- University of Canberra Council.

I now table a schedule of statutory appointments considered during this reporting period:

Social Policy—Standing Committee—Schedule of Statutory Appointments—11th Assembly—Period 1 January to 31 June 2026.

Gambling and Racing Control (Gambling Exclusion) Amendment Bill 2026

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

Title read by Clerk.

DR PATERSON (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health,

Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services, and Minister for Gaming Reform) (5.38): I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

I am pleased to introduce the Gambling and Racing Control (Gambling Exclusion) Amendment Bill to the Assembly today. This bill represents the first piece of legislation that I will introduce to meet ACT Labor's gambling reform commitments from the 2024 election.

The purpose of this bill is to strengthen the legal framework underpinning gambling exclusion and gambling licensees' risk-responsive obligations to the ACT to reduce harm from gambling. These reforms remove barriers for individuals who would like to take a break from gambling by entering into an agreement to be self-excluded from gambling. The reforms also clarify and improve licensees' obligations to monitor, reduce and respond to risks of gambling harm. This may include initiating "licensee exclusion", the pathway to which is also clarified by this bill.

Self-exclusion refers to a process enabling individuals to give legal effect to an intention to be excluded from gambling for a period, and to be supported in that decision by government and licensees of gambling activities, such as electronic gaming machines, casino and sports wagering.

Reforms to improve accessibility of the ACT's self-exclusion scheme are important, because although we know gambling harm prevalence is high, we also know help seeking, particularly through self-exclusion, is low.

In June last year, the ACT government released the 2024 ACT Gambling Survey, which demonstrated emerging trends in gambling participation, risk and harm. The survey estimated that approximately one in six adults—15.8 per cent—reported experiencing at least one type of gambling harm—for example, harm from their own gambling, harm from someone else's gambling or legacy harm from gambling prior to the last 12 months. This figure represents over 58,000 members of our community who experience gambling harm. This is unacceptably high, and I remain committed, as I have always been, to reducing the rates of gambling harm.

The survey further estimated that only one per cent of people who participated in gambling had ever sought help for their gambling, and those who did were twice as likely to access informal supports like talking to family members rather than formal supports like self-exclusion. This is despite evidence that self-exclusion is the most helpful type of support, with the 2024 Gambling Survey finding that 52 per cent of respondents who utilised self-exclusion found it "very helpful". Supports from family and friends and self-help strategies had higher uptake but were perceived as very helpful by fewer survey respondents who had utilised them. Further, the survey showed that awareness of self-exclusion in the ACT is high, with most people at risk of gambling harm being aware of it, which shows that low uptake is not due to low awareness.

Together, these findings demonstrate that uptake of self-exclusion in the ACT is unduly low, given its helpfulness and community awareness. This further demonstrates that reforms to improve the ACT's self-exclusion scheme and its accessibility are an

essential priority for the government to support efforts to reduce harm. This bill responds to that evidence.

Self-exclusion is currently hard to access, as it requires individuals to enter into a deed. Entering into a legal deed involves complex and archaic requirements which are not only onerous and inconvenient for people seeking quick and effective assistance, but also out of step with other jurisdictions offering modern and easy ways to sign up for self-exclusion, such as online smart forms.

This bill changes the legal foundation of the ACT's self-exclusion scheme from a private scheme to a public law scheme by enshrining the scheme in the statute, noting that it currently rests in a subordinate law. This enables improvements to the scheme to remove the requirement that self-exclusion be initiated by the use of a legal deed, as well as clarifying and streamlining the broader requirements and processes underpinning the scheme, to make it easier for individuals and licensees. The bill also includes a clause which validates all previous and current complete self-exclusion deeds when the statutory self-exclusion scheme commences, so there will be no disruption experienced by people who have already self-excluded.

The new statutory scheme will simplify these complex requirements, enabling individuals to give written notice to licensees or the commissioner of their intention to self-exclude, and have that decision validated through a determination made by the Gambling and Racing Commission. The bill enables flexibility in the form of self-exclusion notices, and implementation options will be explored by the commission in the lead-up to the commencement.

The bill includes a range of obligations for licensees and the commission to give effect to a person's intention to self-exclude. For example, it will require a licensee to take appropriate steps to support this decision by preventing excluded people from gambling at their premises.

Other improvements to the ACT self-exclusion scheme which this bill will deliver include increasing the maximum timeframe where individuals can choose to self-exclude from three years to five years, recognising that individuals who seek a long-term break from gambling should be supported in that choice. Many individuals who self-exclude seek the maximum period of three years. A five-year maximum balances increased personal autonomy with challenges to maintain a permanent dataset over time as people may relocate or change names. The bill enshrines in law the role of support people in the self-exclusion process. Support people can include friends, family members and counsellors.

The bill will enable people aged 17 to register for self-exclusion to take effect from their 18th birthday. This provides the option for young people who have concerns about future gambling access to proactively self-exclude prior to lawfully accessing gambling, minimising the potential for future harm to young people and increasing personal autonomy. This is important given evidence demonstrates young people, particularly young men, experience gambling harm at disproportionately high rates, so providing opportunities to disrupt pathways to harm among young people prior to their access responds to this evidence.

By delivering a streamlined pathway to uphold individuals' intentions to take a break from gambling, the clarified and improved self-exclusion laws make an important contribution to harm minimisation in the territory.

Self-exclusion is one part of the ACT's gambling exclusion scheme. The other part is a licensee exclusion. This refers to circumstances where a licensee is required to initiate exclusion due to concerns about the risk of gambling harm to any person resulting from that person or another person's gambling activity. This is one part of a range of obligations on licensees which they must follow to prevent and respond to harm.

The bill will strengthen licensee obligations to monitor and act in response to the risk of harm in their venues. Obligations to respond to gambling harm are already enshrined in the subordinate law. However, it was identified that these obligations would benefit from greater clarity. These reforms were already at an advanced stage of development when the ACAT Hellenic Club decision in relation to licensees' risk-responsive obligations was made. The case provided a further evidence base for these reforms by confirming that the current obligations are not fit for purpose to support licensees to effectively monitor for, reduce, record and take action in response to the risk of gambling harm. This comes at significant risk to individuals and the community and may cause stress or confusion for licensees. The decision therefore reaffirmed the need to reform licensees' risk-responsive obligations and guide the approach to this part of the reform.

The bill clarifies and strengthens the existing roles and obligations of licensees to actively monitor for, reduce, and respond to gambling-related harm, including their responsibility to give effect to self-exclusions and to initiate licensee exclusions where this is the most proportionate response to the risk of harm.

Importantly, the bill clarifies and modernises the definition at the heart of licensees' obligations, which is currently "problem gambling", a deficit-based term with a range of unclear and poorly expressed signs of problem gambling. The bill revises this definition to "risk of gambling harm", with a revised evidence-based approach to identifying risk. This both improves clarity and removes the inherent stigmatisation of individuals at risk of gambling harm in this definition by removing the descriptor of "problem". This reflects that the problem to be addressed is not the person experiencing or at risk of harm, but failure to effectively reduce and respond to the risk of harm in relation to a gambling activity.

Other improvements to the ACT's licensee exclusion and risk-responsive obligations that this bill will deliver include introducing a maximum timeframe for which licensees can exclude individuals of five years, to align with the maximum timeframe for self-exclusion, explicitly and consistently reflecting that the risk of harm to affected others, not just the person participating in gambling, requires licensees to act, and embedding an early intervention ethos throughout licensee obligations through provisions that support risk-responsive action—such as recommending counselling or self-exclusion—early, before the risk of harm escalates to an extent that licensee exclusion or other support is required.

The bill clarifies that simply the presence of specified signs of the risk of harm is sufficient to give rise to licensees' obligations to respond appropriately. An

understanding, consideration or personal belief that the sign amounts to a definition or threshold of risk is not required. This is expected to simplify the process for licensees and remove ambiguity and subjectivity. The bill also clarifies that licensees must take active steps to monitor gambling harm risk, record and reduce this risk where observed.

This bill promotes some human rights in the Human Rights Act and limits others. The bill has been drafted to ensure any limits on these rights go only as far as necessary to achieve their legitimate policy objectives. By contributing to reducing gambling harm, the bill promotes the right to life and the right to liberty and security of person. By enhancing pathways for individuals to exercise their autonomy with regard to taking a break from gambling, the bill promotes the right to privacy, noting that this is generally interpreted to encompass the right to a separate area of autonomy, development, interaction and liberty.

The bill also limits some rights in an appropriate and proportionate way. The obligations on licensees to take action in relation to individuals at risk of gambling harm—including recording information about those individuals and preventing them from gambling in some cases—limits individuals' rights to recognition and equality before the law, privacy, and freedom of movement. The construction of some criminal offences—which include strict liability and reverse legal and evidential burden for some defences—also limits rights in criminal proceedings in relation to licensees who may be prosecuted for those offences.

These limitations are necessary to ensure the ACT's gambling exclusion scheme is effective at preventing and reducing gambling harm, and that sanctions for noncompliance with important obligations are able to ensure its continued efficacy. The limitations are balanced proportionately with these important policy aims.

In summary, the need for this important reform is clear: self-exclusion is a highly effective yet underutilised support for people at risk of gambling harm; and the existing legal framework establishing licensees' risk-responsive obligations needs to be improved and clarified, as it is key to preventing and responding to the risk of gambling harm.

This bill removes barriers to individuals exercising their right to choose not to gamble through self-exclusion, and to be supported in that choice by the commission and licensees. It also improves the framework by setting out licensee obligations to monitor, record, prevent and respond to the risk of gambling harm, including by initiating licensee exclusion where appropriate. It recognises that gambling harm is a serious public health issue which requires robust laws to safeguard individuals' access to supports that best meet their needs and obligate those providing gambling activities to do so ethically.

By giving effect to these important aims, this bill is key to delivering the government's priority of addressing gambling harm, and I am pleased to present it to the Assembly today.

Debate (on motion by **Mr Parton**) adjourned to the next sitting.

Competition Legislation Amendment Bill 2026

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

Title read by Clerk.

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage, and Minister for Sport and Recreation) (5.54):
I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

Today I am pleased to present the Competition Legislation Amendment Bill 2026. The bill amends the Competition Policy Reform Act 1996 and the Independent Competition and Regulatory Commission Act 1997 to align ACT legislation with the revitalised National Competition Policy framework agreed by the commonwealth, states and territories. The bill also removes references to superseded agreements and provisions that formed part of the previous National Competition Policy framework.

The National Competition Policy has been a cornerstone of Australia's economic reform agenda for more than three decades. The original National Competition Policy reforms were agreed by Australian governments in 1995 and delivered significant economic benefits. These reforms promoted competition across the economy and are estimated to have increased Australia's gross domestic product by around 2.5 per cent.

Competition remains important because it encourages innovation, improves service quality and helps deliver better value for consumers and businesses. Effective competition can contribute to higher productivity, stronger economic growth and improved living standards. At the same time governments recognise that competition is not an end in itself. The National Competition Policy principles include a public interest framework that allows governments to balance competition with other important policy objectives, including social, environmental and community outcomes.

In November 2024, the ACT entered into the Intergovernmental Agreement on National Competition Policy with the commonwealth and other jurisdictions. The agreement establishes updated National Competition Policy principles, modernised institutional arrangements and ongoing arrangements for competition law. Implementation of the agreement will also support the territory's access to commonwealth National Competition Policy productivity payments of up to \$5 million.

As part of these arrangements, jurisdictions have committed to align their legislation with the revitalised National Competition Policy framework by the end of 2026. This bill fulfils that commitment.

The bill first amends the Competition Policy Reform Act 1996. The bill introduces a new definition of the National Competition Policy agreement that reflects the 2024 intergovernmental agreement. The amendments remove references to superseded agreements that formed part of the previous National Competition Policy framework. The bill also updates the definition of a participating jurisdiction so that it aligns with the new national agreement and removes references to the former Conduct Code

Agreement, which formed part of the original 1995 framework and has now been superseded.

Finally, the bill makes a technical amendment to reflect the current location of the schedule version of part 4 of the commonwealth's Competition and Consumer Act 2010. States and territories apply the schedule version of part 4 to maintain a nationally consistent competition law. It is now contained in schedule 1, part 1 of the Competition and Consumer Act 2010. Together, these amendments modernise the act and ensure it reflects the current National Competition Policy framework.

The bill also amends the Independent Competition and Regulatory Commission Act 1997. First, the bill updates section 19J to require the Independent Competition and Regulatory Commission, when conducting regulatory reference investigations, to have regard to the competitive neutrality principles contained in the National Competition Policy agreement.

Competitive neutrality is an important principle that seeks to ensure government businesses do not enjoy net competitive advantages simply because of their public ownership. Competitive neutrality means government businesses should not have an unfair advantage over private businesses. This gives private businesses a fair chance to compete, invest and grow, and helps Canberrans to get more choice, better services and value.

Second, the bill clarifies that when the commission is investigating government-regulated activities, it must have regard to the public interest exemption principles contained in the National Competition Policy agreement. These principles reflect the public interest exemption framework contained in the National Competition Policy agreement.

Third, the bill updates provisions relating to the determination of third-party access arrangements by clarifying the matters that a dispute body must consider when determining the terms and conditions of access.

Fourth, the bill updates the definition of an access regime to align with the National Competition Policy agreement. The revised definition recognises arrangements governing third-party access to services provided by infrastructure facilities, whether physical or non-physical, that are wholly or substantially owned, controlled or operated by a single entity.

Fifth, the bill updates the definition of competitive neutrality principles so that it reflects the revitalised national framework. Finally, the bill inserts a definition of the National Competition Policy agreement for the purposes of the act.

Collectively, these amendments ensure that the commission's legislative framework remains consistent with nationally agreed competition policy settings. This is a relatively modest but important bill. The amendments ensure that ACT legislation reflects the revitalised National Competition Policy framework, supports the effective operation of the Independent Competition and Regulatory Commission, and delivers the territory's commitments under the intergovernmental agreement.

The bill will also support the ACT's eligibility for commonwealth funding associated with implementation of the National Competition Policy reforms. I commend the bill to the Assembly.

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

Appropriation Bill 2026-2027

[Cognate bill: Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill 2024-2025]

Debate resumed from 12 June 2026, on motion by Mr Steel:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

MR SPEAKER: I remind members that, in debating order of the day No 1 executive business, they may also address their remarks to executive business order of the day No 2.

Bill agreed to in principle.

Detail stage

MR SPEAKER: Members, standing order 180 sets down the order in which the bill will be considered—that is, in the detail stage, any schedule expressing the services for which the appropriation is to be made must be considered before the clauses and, unless the Assembly otherwise orders, the schedules will be considered by the proposed expenditure in the order shown. With the concurrence of this Assembly, I am proposing that the Assembly consider schedule 1 by each part, consisting of net cost of outputs, capital injection and payments on behalf of the territory. I understand that is the wish of the Assembly. That being so, schedule 1 will be considered by each part, consisting of net cost of outputs, capital injection and payments on behalf of the territory, then the clauses and the title.

Schedule 1—Appropriations—Proposed expenditure.

Education Directorate—Part 1.1

MS LEE (Kurrajong) (6.02): I rise to speak on the Appropriation Bill 2026-27 as it relates to the Education portfolio. At the centre of any education budget should be a simple question: are we improving outcomes for students? Education is one of the most important vehicles by which we can give our children a better start in life—a way in which we can bridge the gap for some of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged in our community. Despite this government's rhetoric, despite years of promises and announcements, the reality of education under this long-term Labor government is that too many indicators are moving in the wrong direction. Student outcomes are declining, teachers and school leaders are under increasing pressure, and confidence in the system is being eroded.

We have seen the government announce budget cuts of more than five per cent for 18 schools across Canberra—cuts that principals were not consulted on; cuts that were simply presented to schools and expected to be absorbed; cuts that will impact students.

Earlier this week, the Australian Education Union raised concerns about the impact these cuts will have on schools, on staff and on students. Head of the AEU ACT, Angela Burroughs, said:

I am yet to find a principal who has had their budget increased. Rather, I am constantly contacted by people who have to make very substantial staffing cuts.

One college principal said in response to the cuts to his college that he did not know what classroom choices his school would be able to offer new year 11 students next year and went to say: “And if we have to, for example, cut staff, that may cut programs.” Typical of this government, these hardworking principals were not consulted on these cuts; they were told, out of the blue—just presented with these cuts.

I am not disputing that reform is needed to ensure more equity across schools. In fact, we have been calling for it for many years. But the issue is that these budget cuts were just presented to principals. There was no consultation before and no discussion about the impact. This is occurring at a time when schools are facing increasingly complex student needs, rising behavioural challenges and growing workforce pressures.

These cuts come only months after the release of the ACT Public School System Resourcing Review—a review that was forced on this government after it was revealed that 77 out of 92 of our ACT government schools were over budget and it was clear that the system was experiencing significant strain. The findings were damning. The review exposed systemic failures that had been years in the making. It showed a government that ignored warning signs and ignored concerns raised by educators, school leaders and parents.

For years, teachers told this government that they were overwhelmed. For years, principals warned that workloads were becoming unsustainable. In fact, Angela Burroughs put it very simply when she said, and observed, that the minister clearly has no idea how dire things are in our schools. For years, parents raised concerns about declining student outcomes and growing inequity across the system. Yet these concerns were ignored year after year after year.

As a result, we now have a government talking about generational reform, because the challenges have become so significant that even they can no longer ignore them. The reality is that our education system is facing challenges on multiple fronts. We have schools dealing with aging and inadequate infrastructure; we have classrooms without reliable heating and cooling; we have ongoing concerns about basic facilities like toilets; we have increasing incidents of occupational violence; and we have growing numbers of students with complex learning, behavioural and wellbeing needs requiring additional support. Most importantly, we have too many students who are not achieving the outcomes they deserve.

Every child, regardless of their postcode or circumstance, deserves the opportunity to succeed; every parent deserves confidence that their child is receiving a world-class education; and every educator deserves the resources and support necessary to deliver that education. Yet this budget does little to restore that confidence.

We saw extradentary evidence during estimates where the Australian Education Union

confirmed that this government cannot even deliver a teacher for every classroom. Let me repeat that: this government cannot even deliver the bare minimum that is required to operate a school—a teacher in every classroom. That speaks volumes. This chaotic, dysfunctional government cannot even deliver a teacher for every classroom—the very basic, the very foundation, the very bare minimum for a school: a teacher for every classroom. That is something they cannot even deliver.

No wonder when genuine issues like the lack of a strategic and coordinated delivery of language education are raised, it is not given any priority. We heard that basic data is not being kept by the directorate, we heard that language education is not being prioritised and we heard that there is the lack of clear, measurable performance indicators for the implementation of the Strong Foundations reforms.

The situation is made worse by the government's continued failure to resolve enterprise bargaining negotiations with our educators. For more than a year, teachers and school staff have negotiated in good faith. For more than a year, they have waited for certainty. Teachers, school leaders and support staff have repeatedly raised concerns that negotiations have been slow, protracted and marked by an apparent reluctance from the government to meaningfully engage with the issues driving workforce shortages, workload pressures and declining staff morale. These negotiations are not just about pay; educators have consistently highlighted concerns about workload, workplace safety, staff shortages, class sizes and the increasing frequency of merged, split or cancelled classes when relief staff cannot be found. The union has argued that without meaningful action on these issues, schools will continue to struggle to attract and retain experienced teachers.

A successful education system depends on a respected, supported and valued workforce. When teachers are forced to spend months, or even years, fighting for recognition of basic workplace concerns, confidence in the government's commitment to education is inevitably weakened. That sends a troubling message to a workforce already under significant pressure. We know that our teachers continue to face growing classroom complexity, increasing administrative burdens and chronic staffing challenges. What they need is support and certainty. Instead, they continue to face delay and uncertainty.

Trust in the government has been significantly undermined by the findings of the Integrity Commission's Operation Kingfisher report—a report that detailed significant and serious corruption at the very heart of this government, resulting in serious corruption findings against the former education minister's chief of staff and the former Director-General of the Education Directorate; a report that highlighted that Education Directorate officials were not interested in the best value for ACT taxpayers but rather what was best for their union mates; a report that demonstrated the influence that the CFMEU has over this government and ACT taxpayer dollars. As the Integrity Commissioner said during the recent budget estimates, he cannot have confidence that the inappropriate influence that was highlighted in the report did not occur on other procurement projects. At a time when schools are being asked to do more with less, Canberrans are entitled to expect that every dollar is being spent transparently, responsibly and in the best interests of students.

Ultimately, our government education system should be about the students sitting in our classrooms today, the student who needs additional learning support, the student

struggling to learn to read or do maths, the student whose opportunities are diminished when programs are cut and resources stretched. The measure of an education system is not the number of reviews it undertakes but whether its students are succeeding—and, sadly, based on what we are seeing, the evidence suggests that they are not.

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (6.12): I rise to speak to the education outputs in this budget as the ACT Greens spokesperson for education. The need to get this budget right for education could not have been more critical, nor more blatant, to this government. We have had ACT public school teachers striking for the first time in 15 years and bargaining dragging on for a year; we have had Assembly inquiries which found the government's plan for language education was not fit for purpose; and we have had stark trends of classes continuing to be split, collapsed and cancelled, with young people paying the price.

But what is more crucial is that we remember, in the context of this budget debate, that the government has never been in a more informed position to get its education investment right than it has been this year. With the completion and the release of the ACT Public School System Resourcing Review in April and officials briefed months beforehand, the government had everything it needed in front of them to invest properly; it just needed to do it. I want to be clear, after question time today, that the ACT Greens wholeheartedly support the work of the Education Directorate in completing the resourcing review and the work of all the educators, students, parents and school community who contributed to it. What we take issue with—or at the very least are rightly seeking to scrutinise in this place—is the discrepancy between the government's characterisation of engaging with principals for recent budget changes and what we are hearing from principals directly. But we will get to that.

Despite the government being so well armed with the resourcing review and its recommendations, we have ended up with a budget that falls short for schools and students. This is not a grandstanding statement or even something I am saying merely because the ACT Greens believe there is nowhere better to put public money than our public education system. I am saying this because the government's budget choices for education and poor decision-making with implementation have directly gone against findings from the resourcing review and advice from key reform partners who championed it. I can solidly say that myself, many students, teachers and parents are more than a little disappointed with how things have played out recently. The hope that I had upon hearing the government's first enthusiastic response to the resourcing review, which we all agree really confirmed what teachers and parents have been saying for years, has well and truly waned.

The most blurring and recent example of this is the cuts to college budgets for next year that were just announced. While the government's move towards resourcing school funding to be more equitable across the system is positive, its execution has missed the mark. Of course, we should have a needs-based school funding system—it is baffling that we do not already—but the way the government dumped this on colleges, which many have described as throwing principals under the bus, is just wrong. What is more, it blatantly goes against the findings of the resourcing review, which the minister quoted during question time this afternoon but did not choose to omit the following. The quote starts: “At present, primary students are allocated only 79.6 per cent of the base funding of secondary students in 2026.” However, given the significant number of high schools

and colleges over the budget, “There is not scope to rebalance within the existing funding envelope. Instead, this requires medium-term consideration within the national context.”

Does a funding cut of approximately \$4 million across nine ACT colleges for next year’s school budgets sound like medium-term consideration within the national context to you? What is more, does a reduction in nine colleges’ budgets for a school year that is months away sound like a logical move when we know many are already over their allocated budget and over capacity? I understand the need to make adjustments to properly resource our primary schools for next year, and I understand this is no easy task. Primary schools have been woefully under-resourced for so long and, as we know, they have a challenging task of supporting students in the early years with complex needs emerging. This is especially being felt in the context of a changing disability support landscape in our community. But this should not be a cost that colleges have to bear or compensate. In fact, it is more than “should not”; many simply cannot.

Canberra College was overcapacity at 111 per cent according to the 2026 census data. Students in later years have already put in their subject preferences, only to hear that there was potential for language classes to be cut or for co-curriculars that they had done all throughout school to be scrapped. I cannot help but think that this fallout and the real negative consequence for many in our school system could have been avoided. At the time of announcement, we called for clarity. The directorate said there was a collective funding pool available to assist in cases where colleges would need support, yet provided no information on what the criteria would be to access this collective pool.

We asked for a red line on what offerings would be deemed essential and therefore not viable to be lost through the budget cuts. We have not received transparency nor clarity on this red line. I call on the education minister to provide this publicly today. What red line has the government drawn internally for cuts to be deemed viable or not? What public commitment will they make to college students and teachers about what can be guaranteed on the first day of term next year? What are we calling a nice-to-have versus a need-to-have, and who gets a say in making those distinctions?

I asked the government: “Will you commit to no language offerings or pathways being lost as a result of these cuts, or no combining of classes to the detriment of student experience and workplace sustainability for teachers?” The government said they notified the affected college principals early about cuts. My understanding is they told them on the Monday and the budgets were distributed on Tuesday. You can decide whether one day is fair warning. It is definitely not consultation; I can tell you that much.

It is a little surprise then that the reform partners group for the one system reform, the AEU, ACT Parents and the ACT Principals Association, all individually came out in public opposition and, I would say, distress when the news of these cuts broke. Making massive decisions unilaterally is not partnership, and I call on the education minister and the directorate to engage constructively and collaboratively with the people who actually know the system from the inside and are best placed to inform its reform.

This leads us back to the fundamental question of how the findings of the resourcing review are being taken on and why the government have failed to ensure that they

shaped the budget for the better. Another key takeaway from the resourcing review, which the government committed to addressing at the time of its publication, was the insufficient resourcing for key cohorts who, under the current funding model, are being harmfully overlooked. This includes First Nations students, students with English as an additional language or dialect, students with a disability and students who require flexible education to access learning.

The parents and communities of First Nations students, and indeed those students themselves, have told us time and time again that cultural safety is vital for learning and student experience in schools. This was affirmed in the resourcing review's findings, which drew from recommendations of the Jumbunna report. I welcome the government's commitment to establishing new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander governance arrangements in line with these recommendations. However, there is more work to be done and greater investment required.

In its response to the resourcing review, the government announced that the funding for adjustments for individual children at Koori Preschool is inadequate, and its solution to this was a commitment to reviewing the system's funding methodology. I appreciate that commitment, but this alone will not support students and families in the meantime, and the lack of a timeline for the directorate's review into the funding methodology is also a cause for concern.

In a briefing that my office received from the Education Directorate—and I appreciate the minister facilitated that—I was informed that the \$7 million will be invested to supplement the Cultural Integrity Allocation. I would love the Minister for Education to explain how this money will be purposed to improve the school experience of First Nations students in ACT schools and when we can expect it to be actually felt in ACT classrooms. Supporting our First Nations students to thrive in school is not just about student loadings and preschool funding; it is also about uplifting our whole schools and teaching capacities and the status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and culture.

For students with English as an additional language or dialect, the resourcing review clearly stated that the current envelope has not grown in proportion to the increase in the number of these students. Because of this, the costs of supporting these students are increasingly being covered by schools themselves, with insufficient and sometimes no funding to cover the costs. Without reform or review, the current allocation methodology is not predicted to grow in alignment with a level of need for EALD students. This was yet another area where the need to review the current funding model was raised. Again, despite the recurring calls for re-evaluation, no timeline has been provided for this review. We know the current funding model is not keeping pace with need. So when will the government demonstrate what timelines it has committed to this work?

Investment in supports for students with a disability has largely come in the form of a new adjustment-based resourcing model, which the government committed to doing years ago. I, along with pretty much everyone in the education space, called for the end of the SCAN model for years. I know people who have gone through all sides of the SCAN model. It sucked for them. I am glad that the government is finally seeing this through and committing funds to support the new model in schools. *(Second speaking*

period taken.)

In saying this, the investment for students with a disability falls short of what the resourcing review called for, which was:

The ACT Government should increase the envelope of funding allocated to supporting students with disability in public schools, so every school can be appropriately allocated funding for students with disability when the new adjustment-based resourcing model is introduced in 2027.

The envelope of funding has not seen the substantial uplift envisaged by this review. While the government points to funding increasing from \$74.1 million in 2026 to \$87.2 million in 2027, around \$7 million of that increase is tied to specialist school uplifts and a further \$3 million is allocated through the Extensive Plus allocation. That is the one for students with the most intensive support needs. Once those allocations are accounted for, and before you take into account indexation and further funding reallocations within the model, only about \$3.1 million of the headline increase remains. My understanding is that most of this will go towards the rollout of the adjustment based model for students with a disability, which I suspect means little, if any, will actually be left to provide students with a disability the supports they need in the classrooms in time for when they need it.

The trickle-down effects of improved systems for commonwealth data collection through the NCCD will not be felt for some time—possibly years. Our students with a disability need support now. Schools should receive support based on the needs of their students, but, if the total funding package remains inadequate, changing the formula does not solve the underlying problem.

Alongside this, I am extremely concerned by the fact that this public education budget does not expressly recognise the impact that Thriving Kids will have on our school system or early childhood education system. We have repeatedly asked the government to provide as much clarity as possible about Thriving Kids and to plan for its inevitable impact on our education systems. The government's response has consistently been that Thriving Kids is not something which teachers or schools will be involved in. Given how much strain teachers are already experiencing and the resourcing pressures schools are facing, it feels naive to presume that the system which engages with every child daily will not need preparation for a program like Thriving Kids. Big system changes do not happen in a vacuum, according to the budget output the government puts it in. Our education system must be prepared for the impacts of a changing disability landscape, and what this really means is that the government must prepare it with appropriate funding and resources so they are able to do so.

Flexible education is another thing the government could not have been in a more prepared and informed position to get right. A review into flexible education has already been completed, and, although the government has failed to make its findings publicly available at this point in time, despite calls from community and key education stakeholders, we heard at estimates that the review confirmed a massive need for flexible education offerings to be increased. This requires investment, not another feasibility study, which was all the government committed to in this budget. Of course, planning for future growth is important, but students struggling in mainstream settings need support right now, not after another review, business case or round of

consideration.

A couple of years ago, I was lucky enough to talk to parents of students experiencing “school can’t”, and even then those families were exhausted. They were overwhelmed and they were sick of what felt like banging their heads against a brick wall. Meanwhile, the government’s own advice indicates a long-term need for significantly more flexible education places, and this budget does not provide that. The estimates committee report rightly expressed concern about the length of time it has taken to respond to the growing demand and called for immediate action, including implementing the recommendations of the Flexible Education Program review and restoring Muliyan’s onsite capacity. When need is already so well understood and accepted, there comes a point when just continuing to study the problem becomes a substitute for solving it. For vulnerable students who rely on flexible education to be engaged in learning, that point is overdue.

The final thing that must be highlighted in the context of this year’s budget for education is, importantly, staffing. The government has been unable to resolve bargaining with the Education Union for over a year. School staff have had no choice but to go on strike. We saw students and parents, as well as the broader Canberra community, stand alongside them. Learning support assistants went on strike, I believe for the first time ever in the ACT. My office and my colleagues’ offices received countless emails from parents expressing their support for education workers who took industrial action. Their message was clear. They supported the strike because what they saw clearly was the value teachers bring to our society, the hard work they do and the growth of their children because of them.

The resourcing review reinforced exactly what teachers have been saying for years. They found that staffing is the single largest cost pressure facing schools. They found that budgets for casual relief teachers have not kept pace with actual patterns of leave. I appreciate COVID is a factor, but it does not change the pressure it puts on the system. It found that workforce pressures are placing immense strain on schools and that inequities in staffing distribution disproportionately impact students already experiencing disadvantage. The same patterns very predictably burn out staff, who are often the ones holding the system together. The government has pointed to changes in casual relief funding as evidence that it is responding, and, while that adjustment is welcome, it addresses only one symptom of a much larger problem. We need a real teaching workforce strategy—one that is based on need and incorporates something as fundamental as, heck, a minimum staffing requirement.

The government entered this budget process armed with one of the most comprehensive reviews of our ACT public education system in recent memory. The resourcing review identified what was working, what was not working and where we desperately needed investment in the short, medium and long term. It provided a roadmap for reform grounded in evidence and informed by the lived experience of teachers, educators, learning support assistants, principals, parents and students, yet too many of the decisions in this budget contradict those findings, defer action to a later date or provide new administrative arrangements without additional investment which will go the distance in making the difference with urgency.

Whether it is cuts to college funding despite warnings against redistributions within the existing envelope, the failure to meaningfully increase funding for students with a

disability despite clear recommendations to do so, the lack of meaningful investment in support for students with English as an additional language or dialect, or the decision to fund another study into flexible education rather than urgently expanding capacity, the same pattern repeats itself.

Our students only get one chance at education. The pressures identified in the resourcing review were not future problems for future budgets; they were long-standing problems, which are the realities playing out in the classroom daily. This budget could have given us all great hope for the rollout of the one-system reforms and the big overdue changes our public education system desperately needs. I still have hope, but I want to make it clear that we see what has not been heeded from the review's advice and we will be unsurprised if need continues to grow when the budget solutions do not reflect the current level of need.

The Greens will continue to fight for a genuinely needs based public education system—one developed in partnership with the people who know it best, and one that ensures that every young person has the support they need to thrive, because what on earth are we doing if we are not investing properly in the public education system for our young people?

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.

Debate (on motion by **Ms Stephen-Smith**) adjourned to the next sitting.

Statements by members

Transport Canberra—advertising on buses and bus shelters

MS VASSAROTTI (Kurrajong) (6.31): As noted in questions without notice today, I wrote to Minister Cheyne about junk food ads being spotted not just on bus shelters but also on buses. Her office replied saying, “Advertising on Transport Canberra buses and light-rail vehicles is subject to ACT government advertising guidelines in addition to Australian advertising standards.” These guidelines state that advertising must not represent, portray or promote junk food, fast food or unhealthy food and drinks, as defined by the Australian Dietary Guidelines and associated Guide to Healthy Eating.

Minister Cheyne’s office also stated that the directorate is not aware of the specific advertisements being referred to in the correspondence and asked if details of the advertisements could be provided. They will work with their transit advertising contract manager to determine whether these advertisements comply with the guidelines. I therefore seek leave to table evidence of a junk food advertisement on a bus here in the ACT so that the directorate can pursue and rectify this breach of ACT government policy.

Leave granted.

I present the following paper:

Advertisement on Action Bus—Copy of photo.

Duffy—The Gallery Next Door

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (6.33): Almost two months ago, Jennifer Baird opened The Gallery Next Door at the Duffy shops. Jen is deeply connected to the local arts community, saw the clear need for a local arts space and took it upon herself to address this need. The Gallery Next Door at Duffy shops is a popular spot, and I congratulate Jen for having the drive to get it up and running.

I have been calling for arts facilities in the Woden, Weston Creek and Molonglo area, and, while it is great to see the private sector stepping in to meet a clear community need, we also need permanent public arts facilities to support a vibrant local arts scene. Jen has held two fantastic exhibitions that have brought people together for art, music, nibbles and pride in their local shops. I thank Jen for her amazing work and the financial risk she has taken in starting up a bricks and mortar business, all to give a space for local artists to flourish. Thank you, Jen.

Community events—Canberra Alliance for Participatory Democracy and Active Democracy Bean

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (6.34): I want to give a shout-out and acknowledgement to the Canberra Alliance for Participatory Democracy and Active Democracy Bean, who have been hosting a series of panels and forums on Reimagining Governance for the ACT, to explore how our political and democratic system might operate more effectively. It was a great delight to be on the panel at the second round, along with Ms Carrick, other MLAs and community council leaders, to look at the role that community councils might play in ACT's governance. We have community councils at the moment that are certainly not like a normal state based council, but they have an advocacy role for the community.

I really enjoyed being part of that panel. Ms Carrick, Mr Braddock and Mr Werner-Gibbings also represented their respective parties. It was nice to share the panel with Jeff Bollard from the Tuggeranong Community Council and Nelson Tang from the Woden Valley Community Council. I look forward to subsequent forums of the Canberra Alliance for Participatory Democracy and Active Democracy Bean as well.

Discussion concluded.

Adjournment

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

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

Seniors—Seniors Month

MS TOUGH (Brindabella—Minister for Human Rights, Minister for Community Services, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Women, Seniors and Veterans, and Minister for the Prevention of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence) (6.35): I want to take a moment to recognise that September is Seniors Month and recognise the

contributions that older Canberrans make to our community. Always, but particularly in September, we celebrate Seniors Month and the contribution seniors make to our community. I want to talk about the diverse program of events and activities that are happening across the territory this month.

Supported by the ACT government and delivered by COTA, Seniors Month is a fantastic opportunity for older Canberrans to connect with communities, learn new skills, access support services and participate in activities that promote healthy and active ageing. Next week, on 23 and 24 September, the Seniors Expo will be held at the Old Bus Depot building in Kingston. The expo is an incredible event and will feature more than 150 exhibitors providing information on products, services and opportunities which help older Canberrans remain active, connected and independent. I encourage all seniors in the community to go along to that expo and chat to so many people about all the different things on offer for seniors in our community.

There is not only that. On 23 September at the expo, the Positive Ageing Awards will be presented, recognising organisations, services and businesses which make a positive contribution to the lives of older Canberrans. And, on 24 September, the Band of the Royal Military College, Duntroon, will perform at the Chief Minister's concert. I was lucky enough to attend that concert last year and it was a pretty fun event, so I hope it is well attended again this year. It is a lot of fun, with the band from the Royal Military College playing a range of tunes. It is something really special that the government is able to put on for seniors.

I want to take a moment to thank COTA for all the work they do throughout the year and for putting on the expo. Also, I had the privilege of attending a meeting of the Ministerial Advisory Council on Ageing last week and heard all the incredible things they are doing for older Canberrans in our community. I look forward to working with them and our community going forward.

Health—sudden cardiac arrest

MS VASSAROTTI (Kurrajong) (6.38): On 11 August this year, I had the privilege of attending an event at Parliament House to raise awareness of the risks of sudden cardiac arrest, especially in young people. I would like to acknowledge Karen Gardner, who personally invited me to the event and is here today. It was an incredibly moving event, with many brave family members and friends speaking, in attendance or sending best wishes as they come to terms with such an unfathomable loss. Even if we have not experienced it ourselves, we have probably all imagined what it must be like to receive the news of a sudden and shocking loss, thanks to a car accident or an event without a clear cause. Almost all of us, too, would have lost a friend or loved one in a slower or less unexpected way, perhaps through cancer or old age.

Every one of those losses is hard in its own way, yet there is another kind of loss that is just as hard, and that has an extra layer of grief to it—that is, when it is a young person with no relevant health history and no warning signs, when they simply collapse or cannot be woken up in the morning.

I stood listening to the experiences of families that have had to face the unimaginable and sudden loss of a much-loved member of their family. It is hard to fathom how

families could process and create a different sort of reality to the one they thought was in front of them after this happens. For some of the families we heard from, there was never an answer. Post-mortem examination could not come up with a clear cause of death. For others, there was an answer, but it hardly helped—evidence of an undiagnosed heart condition, which meant a life could have been saved if someone had known.

My heart goes out to anyone who has lost someone in this way. I want to draw attention today to the work of the Australian Sudden Cardiac Arrest Alliance, and to the actions they are calling for, so that the pain and shock of these deaths can be avoided in the future in as many cases as possible. The numbers are significant. Every year, around 32,000 Australians suffer a sudden cardiac arrest when they are not in hospital, and fewer than one in 10 of those people survives. It is one of the biggest killers of people under the age of 50. Of course, those deaths are not just a statistic; they are human beings beloved by others.

ASCAA thinks that Australia can do better. It is working to see improvement in four areas: prevention, survival, support and learning. It is calling for a three-point national strategy, which I urge the ACT government to support. Firstly, using the national health ministers meeting as a formal pathway, they want sudden cardiac arrest recognised as a public health emergency, with the goal of doubling the survival rate. Secondly, they want an immediate allocation of \$20 million in funding to be spent across the four pillars of prevention that I just mentioned—survival, support and learning. Thirdly, it wants a further \$50 million over five years to implement a national sudden cardiac arrest plan at scale. It is a relatively small investment, and it builds on the work that ASCAA is already doing.

I am very grateful that I was able to attend the event, and I will continue to raise awareness of this issue. I urge the government, especially the new health minister, Dr Paterson, to support its plan.

Joseph “Lord Joseph” McGrail-Bateup—tribute

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (6.42): I want to speak in memory of the recently departed Lord Joseph McGrail Bateup, whose passing has been deeply felt across our community in Canberra, Queanbeyan and beyond. Many know Lord Joseph as our official town crier—a role he carried out with tremendous pride, enthusiasm and unmistakable sense of occasion. He always had his bell with him to ring, it seemed, just in case.

Appointed as Canberra’s town crier in 2017, he became a familiar and much-loved figure at community events, school fetes, charity functions and civic celebrations, helping to preserve a tradition that dates back centuries, while making it uniquely his own. Lord Joseph was more than just a ceremonial figure. He was a true ambassador for Canberra, representing our city with distinction across Australia through the Ancient and Honourable Guild of Australian Town Criers. Yes, that is a thing.

His dedication to the craft saw him compete successfully in town crier championships, including winning recognition in 2024 for the loudest rendition of the traditional “Oyez, Oyez, Oyez!” at 98 decibels. I am sure I could not reach that level. But it was this year that his name reached audiences around the world. In May this year, Lord Joseph

achieved what many thought unachievable. He recorded the loudest shout by an individual male, as recognised by the Guinness World Records organisation. For a man whose role was to make himself heard, it seemed fitting that one of his final achievements before he passed was to ensure that his voice would be remembered around the world and in the record books.

I had the pleasure of hosting a reception for the National Town Crier Championships here at the Assembly, where Lord Joseph's passion for the profession was immediately evident. It was an honour to spend time with someone who brought such energy, humour and commitment to preserving an important part of our civic heritage.

He visited the Assembly soon after the announcement of his world record. I know he visited many ministers and MLAs. It was a delight and honour to have him in my office. Sadly, for the last time, I had an opportunity to be in his company before he passed recently.

My thoughts, of course—and, I am sure, all our thoughts—are with his daughter, his family, his friends and his fellow town criers—all those whose lives he touched. I am sure they will remember him with fondness. Canberra has lost a unique character, a proud community advocate, and a wonderful ambassador for our city. Vale, Lord Joseph.

World Suicide Prevention Day

DR PATERSON (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services, and Minister for Gaming Reform) (6.45): Last Thursday, 10 September, was World Suicide Prevention Day. For families and friends affected by suicide, it was a day of remembering and reflection. Each life lost to suicide has a devastating and far-reaching emotional, social and economic impact on families, friends, workplaces, schools and entire communities.

I am profoundly aware of the gravity of this issue, and I am humbled by the opportunity that being the new Minister for Mental Health presents to work in the mental health and suicide prevention space. I have been meeting with stakeholders and building my understanding of these important matters. I am learning that we have strong connections among government, community sector and lived experience, working together to promote mental wellbeing and suicide prevention here in the ACT.

The theme of this year's World Suicide Prevention Day is "Changing the Narrative on Suicide", with the call to action being "Start the Conversation". This theme calls on all of us to challenge myths, reduce stigma and foster open, compassionate conversations about suicide.

Many community organisations are doing amazing work in combating stigma and silence around suicide. These initiatives offer important opportunities for whole-of-community awareness on this matter that affects all of us. But beyond awareness raising, we also know that it is important to provide the services and support that people need. While not exclusive, we know that there is a strong link between mental ill health and suicide, and our clinical services continue to provide effective mental health care for people when they need it most.

There continues to be a significant amount of work in the ACT to implement services that contribute to a universal after-care model as part of the joint Australian and ACT government mental health and suicide prevention bilateral agreement.

The Minds Together training program is available to all families, friends and carers in the ACT who provide support to someone experiencing suicidal distress or following a suicide attempt. We have responded proactively to the need for increased peer support through funding *Roses in the Ocean* to deliver the Peer CARE Companion in Community program.

Additionally, the Youth Coalition of the ACT continues to co-design a youth aftercare service for people aged 12 to 25, with consideration of LGBTIQ+ young people, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, those who are culturally and linguistically diverse, and input from parents and carers.

We also have a range of targeted supports for some of the populations that face increased need. Mental Illness Education ACT delivers the Youth Aware of Mental Health school-based initiative for young people. It promotes mental health awareness and encourages discussion around mental health and wellbeing. Further, we also have a range of culturally appropriate supports for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the ACT, including Thirrili's suicide prevention, early intervention, aftercare and postvention services.

I recognise that suicide is complex, and many of the factors that affect people sit outside the traditional remit of a health system. Therefore, to achieve meaningful reduction in suicidology, we need coordinated preventive action across government and the community to reduce loneliness, increase connectedness and address suffering.

This need for coordinated action came through strongly in the recent work of the social policy committee inquiry into men's suicide rates. The ACT government is currently considering the recommendations made in the final report, and I look forward to tabling our response in the coming weeks.

It is timely for us to further focus our efforts, and the Health and Community Services Directorate is currently scoping the development of an ACT suicide prevention implementation plan against the National Suicide Prevention Strategy. This will map the existing ACT initiatives and inform priorities for coming years. It will also consider the priority population groups to ensure there is an evidence-based, informed approach to suicide prevention efforts in the ACT.

In closing, I would like to acknowledge that continued efforts across government and the community are key to suicide prevention. Our collective efforts matter, and I look forward to working with government partners and the broader ACT community to ensure better outcomes for all.

Housing affordability—university student accommodation

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (6.51): I rise to speak in solidarity with students petitioning against the current student housing price increases. While the cost of living

has risen significantly, with CPI increasing 3.5 per cent this year, every university accommodation but one at the ANU will increase above the rate of inflation, with an average—not maximum, but average—increase of 4.7 per cent. Because of this, at a time when students should be worried about their mid-semester exams, they are forced to petition against this disproportionate rise in housing that solely affects them. While the renters in the private market are protected by legislation, students are left defenceless against the disproportionate increase in the price of housing. At one of the most formative times in their lives, our current legislation is failing to protect them. For the students who are our constituents—or your future workforce, if that is your priority—why do we not give them the same protections as private renters?

On-campus accommodation is already unaffordable for most students. Even without these increases, ANU accommodation is pricing out low-socioeconomic status students, with the university having one of the lowest proportion of disadvantaged students in the country—and it is no wonder as to why. With the projected increases, students living at the cheapest ANU accommodation are left spending over 75 per cent of Youth Allowance on rent—over 200 per cent above the threshold considered rental stress. As one petitioner signatory put it, “What is the point in having student accommodation if students cannot afford it?” Universities cannot claim they are not aware of this reality. Hundreds of beds are being left empty, and yet prices continue to rise.

In a cost-of-living crisis, why are we allowing our students to be exploited? These price increases come whilst the students have no protections to ensure regulation of living standards. Students already have to worry about the consequences of the lacklustre legislation: black mould in their accommodation, no guarantee of proper living standards and a one-sided ability for universities to terminate their occupancy. The student housing situation is already objectionable, and yet we are allowing prices to rise in spite of this. When will we hold these universities to account? When will we regulate these providers?

Currently, we are allowing corporatised university and accommodation providers to make excess profit off of student misery. The ACT Greens believe we need to put student lives above the wallets of these massive corporations and their investors, and we call on the government to do the same. The Greens are fighting for urgent reform in this area, and we fight alongside hundreds of students. Let’s not forget: these are the students who already pay universities tens of thousands of dollars a year and yet are not guaranteed safe and comfortable housing. We are fighting to make student housing genuinely liveable and affordable for everyone.

At a time where the cost of living is already high, students are feeling the financial pressure. If rent continues to increase and no regulation comes, we will be directly impacting the wellbeing of countless students. We cannot allow them to be exploited any longer. When debt, exams and life are already stressful enough, students cannot afford these prices, mentally or financially. No-one should need to petition for protections others already enjoy. Now is the time to prioritise student wellbeing. The future of these students is in our hands and the government needs to do something about it—and, if we have to change the law to do it, then let’s change the darn law.

The Hon. Mary Gaudron KC—tribute

MS BARRY (Ginninderra) (6.54): I rise today to pay tribute to a trailblazer and a giant of the legal profession, Justice Mary Gaudron KC. Her Honour was a groundbreaking figure and a beacon of inspiration and fairness for many people across Australia, particularly women. She achieved several notable firsts. As the first woman judge ever appointed to the High Court of Australia and the first woman ever appointed Solicitor-General of New South Wales, she broke barriers and records.

She was a woman who came from humble beginnings and was defined by her intellect, her integrity, her compassion and her privacy. Indeed, when Pamela Burton was writing the only biography that was ever written about Justice Gaudron, rumour has it that Her Honour actively sought to stop it from being written. As any judicial biography enthusiast will say, we are glad to have the insight into such a great woman's life.

Her Honour led a remarkable life and contributed to some of the most significant developments in Australian legal history. Perhaps most notably was Her Honour's role in the landmark Mabo No 2 decision in 1992. She leaves behind an extraordinary legacy and one that will be remembered and studied for years to come. We thank her for her service and her contributions to the Australian legal profession. Vale Justice Gaudron.

The Assembly adjourned at 6.55 pm.