



DEBATES
OF THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

DAILY HANSARD

Edited proof transcript

22 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 **Thursday, 15 October 2026**.

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Tuesday, 22 September 2026

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

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

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

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

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

Petitions

The following petitions were lodged for presentation:

Alcohol and other drugs—Arcadia House—proposed relocation—petition 56-26

By Ms Barry, from 855 residents:

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

The following residents of the ACT draw the attention of the Assembly to concerns regarding the proposed relocation of Directions Health Services' Arcadia House to a site in Cook. While we support access to addiction treatment, recovery services, and community-based healthcare, we are concerned that the current proposal has caused significant anxiety among local residents, families, childcare providers, schools, and community organisations.

Your petitioners, therefore, request the Assembly to call on the ACT Government to pause any decision to relocate Arcadia House to Cook. Undertake an independent community impact assessment and publish the findings. Release all site selection criteria and supporting evidence used to identify Cook as a potential location. Conduct meaningful consultation with residents, schools, childcare centres, local businesses, and community organisations before any final decision is made. Investigate alternative locations that are more appropriate and have less impact on surrounding residential communities.

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

Roads—safety—Downer—petition 70-26

By Mr Emerson, from 218 residents:

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

The following petition of certain residents of the Australian Capital Territory draws to the attention of the Assembly for the need to increase the safety for all pedestrian traffic, around the Downer Community Centre precinct.

Currently pedestrians including the elderly, small children and dog walkers are under threat of serious injury or worse from cars and delivery vans accessing the parking area at the rear of the Downer Community hub. The design of the road into the parking area does not provide vehicles with good visibility at a point of high pedestrian traffic from the sporting fields to the community square and cafe. Furthermore, despite existing signage, the road allows excessive speed around a corner which funnels into a busy parking area adjacent to the sporting fields, Goodwin Homes, the Gang Gang cafe and a residential apartment area.

While there have been no serious incidents to date, this is due to good fortune rather than design and there have been a few close calls highlighting the dangerous situation and the need for a permanent solution. For example, young children playing on the oval, have raced across the road chasing dogs or so engrossed in their game they have not realised that they are entering a traffic area. The opening of Goodwin Homes Centre and the increased use of the adjacent sporting fields have added to the dangerous situation as more people cross the road. The planning of the safety measures needs to take into consideration the proposed new toilet facilities.

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

1. Install traffic calming measures such as two speed humps, traffic fish eye mirror and a designated pedestrian crossing.
2. Install speed limit and safety/beware signs indicating the presence of small children and other pedestrian traffic.

Roads—safety—Antill Street, Dickson—petition 76-26

By Ms Vassarotti, from 182 residents:

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

The following residents of the ACT draw the attention of the Assembly to the immediate need for the installation of a new, formal pedestrian crossing on Antill Street.

On Antill Street, there is currently a 1.2km gap between the turnoff to Cowper Street and the roundabout onto Phillip Avenue with no official crossings. This gap runs along the entire length of the Dickson Playing Fields, Dickson College and Dickson pool, alongside residential housing and turnoffs onto 5 other residential streets. The lack of a formal crossing of any kind along this stretch, Antill Street poses a significant risk to the local community, given;

1. The Dickson Playing Fields are host to a range of community events, including

junior soccer leagues. As Antill Street is a dual carriageway road with a 60kmph limit, the lack of a formal crossing significantly increases the likelihood of a collision with a pedestrian. Since these junior leagues are primarily composed of young children, who are less perceptive and spatially aware, the risk of an accident is considerable.

2. There are numerous bus stops located along Antill Street, which see consistent usage from the community; particularly Dickson College students. Students primarily ride bus services during the early morning and afternoon, when traffic is at its peak and commuters are in a rush to get to/home from work. This presents an unnecessary risk for students attempting to cross the road to attend school, with numerous 'near misses' occurring each week. Furthermore, it is unreasonable to expect students taking this route to school to cross at the existing crossings on Antill Street or Phillip Avenue, as they are located at a significant distance from each bus stop, and the school.

3. Speeding and a lack of visibility for pedestrians is a consistent problem on Antill Street. The lack of a 'Wombat Crossing', 'Zebra Crossing', or a 'Marked Foot Crossing' between Phillip Avenue and Cowper Street reduces the visibility of all pedestrians crossing the street. This exacerbates the risks posed to pedestrians and drivers by incidents of speeding on Antill Street.

4. Whilst there has been a response from 'Fix My Road' confirming the community need for a formal crossing on Antill Street, the project is not scheduled to be completed until 30/06/2029. This presents an unacceptable risk to the community, as the lack of a crossing presents a significant danger to pedestrians and drivers now.

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

1. Expedite plans to install at least one formal pedestrian crossing point on Antill Street in the gap between Phillip Avenue and Cowper Street; located within 20 metres of the existing bus stops near the turnoff to Cadell Street.

2. Install safety signs along Antill Street to indicate the presence of pedestrians and children to drivers.

3. Conduct a formal investigation to determine if there are any other high-risk roads in the ACT lacking a sufficient quantity of formal crossing points to ensure pedestrian and driver safety.

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.

Ministerial response

The following response to petitions has been lodged:

Canberra Women's Shed—funding—petitions 33-26 and 40-26

By **Mr Pettersson**, Minister for Skills, Training and Industrial Relations, dated 15 September 2026, in response to a petition lodged by Ms Tough on 5 May 2026

concerning funding and support to the Women's Shed Canberra.

The response read as follows:

Dear Mr Finlay

Thank you for your letter about Petitions *E-PET-033-26 and PET-040-26*, lodged by Ms Cailin Tough MLA, regarding funding and multi-year support to the Women's Shed Canberra.

The Government notes the matters raised in the petitions and provides the following advice.

The ACT Government recognises the importance of supporting the participation, mental health and wellbeing of ACT women and girls, and the importance of programs that enable women to develop their skills and confidence, to ensure they can thrive. These include programs like those offered by the Women's Shed Canberra Inc.

Over the past 18 months, Infrastructure Canberra (iCBR) has worked closely with the Women's Shed Canberra, and has responded to requests for building improvements and maintenance as they have arisen. iCBR has continued to support the operator by addressing identified issues where feasible and within available resources. A further site inspection is scheduled for this week to review the facility and identify any additional maintenance or improvement opportunities.

The operator has recently requested the installation of three-phase power. While this is not a standard feature of the building and is not required for its current approved use, iCBR is considering the request and assessing the associated costs, which are estimated to be approximately \$10,000. The operator has also raised concerns regarding heating and cooling. Given the nature and age of the building, maintaining ideal temperatures can be challenging. iCBR remains committed to working collaboratively with the Women's Shed Canberra to ensure the facility continues to meet operational requirements and to consider reasonable improvement requests as they arise.

The ACT Government is in the early stages of developing the next plan for women and gender equity in the ACT. Consultation will include a range of stakeholders on priority areas for action, including in relation to wellbeing, participation and skills. We encourage the Women's Shed Canberra to actively participate in those consultations to ensure that the next plan reflects the needs of a broad range of women across the ACT.

Community spaces like the Women's Shed Canberra are important in bringing women together to not only develop their confidence to participate in community, but contribute to the change they want to see.

Women's participation in the ACT construction sector has continued to increase over recent years, driven by targeted government initiatives designed to encourage more women to enter and remain in traditionally male-dominated trades. Initiatives that promote women's participation in building and construction include investment in early career exposure programs, apprenticeship and training pathways, and procurement settings that incentivise greater female representation on government-funded projects.

The National Skills Agreement specifically recognises the importance of improving vocational education and training (VET) completions and increasing participation in priority sectors, including supporting women to enter and succeed in non-traditional industries such as building and construction.

Fee-free vocational training is delivered through Fee-Free TAFE and Fee-Free Construction, both offered by the Canberra Institute of Technology (CIT), the ACT's public VET provider. Access for priority cohorts is prioritised under Fee-Free TAFE, including women into non-traditional areas.

Through these initiatives, projects will be tailored to address the specific challenges faced by women entering male-dominated industries, helping to increase participation, completion and long-term career outcomes in sectors critical to the ACT's economic growth and housing supply objectives. We trust this information is useful in terms of the broader objectives of the Women's Shed Canberra.

Motion to take note of petitions

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

That the petitions and response so lodged be noted.

Alcohol and other drugs—Arcadia House—proposed relocation—petition 56-26

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (10.02): I want to share a few thoughts about the Arcadia House petition on behalf of Ms Barry. The sponsor of that petition is unable to speak with us this morning. As noted in the petition, Arcadia House is a deeply respected drug and alcohol treatment facility that provides essential services to vulnerable members of our community, but understandably, on the government announcing that it planned to relocate Arcadia House to one of the two green space sites in Cook, local residents recently asked whether these were appropriate sites given they neighboured a childcare centre, a disability support service, a playground and a local church. This petition, launched by local residents, reasonably asked the government to pause its decision to relocate Arcadia House to the Cook sites and investigate alternatives. The sheer number of signatures on this petition reveals the local community's position on this issue. Eight hundred and fifty-six local residents signed this petition to make their views clear.

This petition was just one piece of an ongoing campaign by the local community to make it abundantly clear to the government that the Cook community had sincere concerns about the proposed relocation. It is owing to this sustained campaign by the community that the government walked back its plans and has since abandoned its plans to relocate Arcadia House to one of the two green space sites in Cook. This community campaign, bolstered by this petition, was a win for the Cook community, and I congratulate them on effectively getting their voices heard on an issue that so many in the local community so deeply care about.

I read that on behalf of Ms Barry, who was the sponsor of this community petition. I would like to share a few of my own thoughts on this particular issue. I commend Ms Barry and also Mr Parton, who ran a very successful town hall gathering at a church site in Cook to gather the community's views further on this concerning relocation.

I note that, when I had the opportunity to ask Minister Stephen-Smith why she changed her mind, it was an interesting discussion, because the minister indicated that her firm view was that it was an appropriate and correct site for Arcadia House and that the community concerns were ill-founded and driven by local political interference. I put to the minister: “If you’re still of the view that the community concerns were ill-founded, why did the government change their mind?” I have yet to receive what I consider to be an acceptable reason for the government’s decisions, and there was really no response to that question. It is important for the community to know how the government make these significant decisions, and it will be really interesting to find out, if we can, why they changed their mind.

I commend the petition, as well as Ms Barry’s work and all the members of the community who made their views known in order to produce an outcome that they are comfortable with, to this chamber.

Alcohol and other drugs—Arcadia House—proposed relocation—petition 56-26

MR PARTON (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (10.07): What a complete stuff-up this whole Arcadia House process has been—a chaotic mess. I was present at the forum that was held in Cook some weeks ago, and I applaud the community for coming out in great numbers and having their voices heard. It is clear that the government had this wrong all along, and it is a credit to the community of Cook and the work done by Ms Barry, Mr Cain and Ms Clay that we have arrived at a more sensible position.

I want to touch on the subject of the cost of building things in Canberra. It is extraordinarily high, and one of the reasons for it is stuff-ups like this. I want to point out that, when this flawed project went to tender, my understanding—and I am happy for the government to correct me if I am wrong—is that 16 or 17 companies submitted a tender for what was supposed to be a \$500,000 project. It costs money to submit a tender. How much? Somewhere between \$25,000 and \$30,000, so let’s call it \$27,000. Sixteen times \$27,000 equals \$432,000. So our reality is that the private sector has already spent, cumulatively, \$432,000 on a project that was forecast to cost \$500,000, and the project is not going to get off the ground because the government did not consult properly and pulled the trigger before the gun was loaded. People ask why it is so expensive to build anything in Canberra, and this is one of the reasons.

Alcohol and other drugs—Arcadia House—proposed relocation—petition 56-26

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (10.08): In her absence, I thank Ms Barry for bringing forward this petition. I attended two town hall meetings on this issue. I spoke at one of them. One was a government town hall; one was a community organised town hall. I went to the government drop-in session. I spoke to a lot of community members. I got some really informative briefings and emails from the government on this issue, and I think this issue has landed where it needs to land.

A promise was made to the Cook community when the primary school was shut down, and, given it was in printed materials circulated at the time, it was extremely well

understood by people in the community that this area would be kept as green space and community space. When I looked at that promise made by this government not very long ago and this proposal came forward, it did not match. A lot of people in Cook certainly felt betrayed by that. There were high feelings. People had a lot of different reasons and strong feelings. The Greens will always talk to people and listen to people, but then we take a measured view on what we think is the right thing to do in a given situation.

We definitely need Arcadia House in our suburbs, but it should not be a building put in an area that was promised to the community to be kept as green space and community space. That is not a great way to proceed and that is not going to get good community buy-in for a facility in that location. We spent a fair bit of time on this issue because we are concerned about Arcadia House. We need it in our suburbs. We identified as many sites as we could that we thought might be alternative options. Community members came forward with lots of options. The government is now working through a list. I know that the government has already done quite a lot of work to come up with the two options in Cook.

I think it is a good idea for earlier consultation. People like to see the homework. We got the homework part way through this process. The government put on their website lots of different places that they considered, but that did not come out until after the drop-in sessions and after the town halls. By that stage, the community was already quite heightened on this and quite agitated about whether the government had considered anywhere else. Yes, the government had considered somewhere else, but they did not show their homework. They did not show the decision-making process. The government need to remember that they have been in power for a long time.

When the government have made a promise to the community, the community remembers and they expect that later on. It should at least be acknowledged as a changed process. We cannot rewrite history. It should be understood and acknowledged. If the government are making a conscious decision to change it, they should explicitly talk through the issue with the community and not run a matter as if it has never come up before. People in Canberra have long memories, and we now have a government that has been in power for a long time. I am pleased that this issue has landed where it is. The Cook community want to keep that area for the community and green space. There are probably some other things that we can do in that area, but it needs to be genuinely for the community and green space.

I did something on the weekend that I often do: I walked from my house in Macquarie with my kid and the dog to the Cook shops. We got an ice cream and a snack and then we walked home. That is one of the things that we do. As we walked past that area, there were people walking their dogs and there were people kicking a football. There were a lot of different uses in that area. It is a beautiful area that the community uses, and, if there are changes, they need to be done with the community and they need to be for uses that the community welcomes and understands.

Roads—safety—Downer—petition 70-26

Roads—safety—Antill Street, Dickson—petition 76-26

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (10.13): I am going to speak to the other two petitions

tabled this morning. First of all, I will speak to the one that I have sponsored, from the Downer Community Association, calling for traffic calming measures to improve pedestrian safety around the Downer shops. This area is an incredible community hub. Gang Gang Cafe has essentially become a victim of its own success, and now the parking and pedestrian management arrangements are not safe. Goodwin Village has just moved into the area, which will of course increase both visitors and foot traffic there.

This is a really sensible measure. People who are familiar with the location drive safely around there, but people coming in for the first time will move around what is essentially a blind corner, where small children are often crossing the road between the playing fields, the oval and Gang Gang Cafe. I had this raised with me by multiple residents, including members of the Downer Community Association who have brought this petition forward, saying they would like to see a speed limit, speed bumps, a traffic fish eye mirror, and a designated crossing there to ensure that children can get between the two sites, the oval and the shops, safely.

In the longer term, it might be worth looking at whether we can relocate the parking that is around the back of the shops. It requires cars to travel all the way around the shops. Perhaps parking can be relocated to the other side, to more of the entry to that area. That would make sense in the longer term and is worth looking at, but residents are really keen to see some short-term measures to make this area safer. I think these are really sensible and relatively minor calls on the government to make sure this area is safe. Thankfully, from what I can tell, there have been near misses but no accidents, but I think an accident is waiting to happen if this is not addressed. I hope the government takes this petition seriously. I very much want to thank the Downer Community Association for bringing the petition forward and the 215 people who have signed it.

I want to touch briefly on the petition that has been sponsored by Ms Vassarotti, calling for a crossing on Antill Street, which is not far away. If I made my way to the Downer shops, I would probably travel along this route with my kids. I have personally noticed the lack of a pedestrian crossing along Antill Street, but lots of residents in the area have noticed that this is an issue. It is an issue throughout the week. It is especially an issue on weekends when those ovals are in high use. The Dickson playing fields are along Antill Street and, because the nature of that street almost gives a drag raceway kind of vibe, there is definitely a need for improved pedestrian safety along it, so I am very supportive of a crossing being expedited on Antill Street so that people can get across safely—right near the bus stops as well. This is something that has also been raised with me by cyclists.

I note Ms Lee recently sponsored a petition calling for a crossing elsewhere. People want to be able to walk safely through their neighbourhood. It is a simple ask. In many ways, the city has been built for cars, but we need to be able to co-exist and make sure that motorists are sent a clear signal as to which areas we want to make sure are safe for pedestrians, families, cyclists, and people using mobility devices. These are the things that make our city liveable, make it walkable and make our local neighbourhoods accessible to us in a safe way. I hope that these small infrastructure calls of the government that have been brought forward with the two petitions tabled today are acted on and we get a positive government response to the petitions.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Roads—safety—Downer—petition 70-26

Roads—safety—Antill Street, Dickson—petition 76-26

MS VASSAROTTI(Kurrajong) (10.17): I will speak briefly to the two petitions that Mr Emerson spoke about, that are in very close proximity and sit within our electorate. I absolutely support the calls that have been made in Mr Emerson's petition, because, as he noted, that is an issue that has certainly been raised many times by people in the area. I had the pleasure last week of meeting with residents that have just moved into the new Goodwin facility at Downer. They are really pleased to be calling Downer their new home. They love the area. They love the facilities around it. They love being able to go down to Gang Gang, which has really become a beautiful community hub. But they too raised the issue of pedestrian safety around the area. They also raised some accessibility issues, particularly regarding footpaths around the area. This is something that I wanted to flag that we will be raising with the minister. So it is really good to see that the issues are being raised.

In relation to the petition that I was so pleased to be sponsoring around a pedestrian crossing at Antill Street, this is an issue that I actually will speak to in a bit more detail tomorrow when there will be another complementary petition that will be tabled. Suffice to say, this is an issue that has raised significant interest in the community, with community members from Dickson College, in particular, Majura Football Club and other people using the local area, recognising the need for urgent action in this issue. I heard some very hair-raising stories, particularly around students trying to cross the road in the mornings trying to get to school. I particularly acknowledge the principal petitioner, Mr Shasta Bignell, a Year 12 student from Dickson College, who has shown real leadership on this issue and really brought people together. But I will speak a little bit more to that tomorrow.

Roads—safety—Downer—petition 70-26

Roads—safety—Antill Street, Dickson—petition 76-26

MS LEE(Kurrajong) (10.19): I was feeling left out, as the only other member for Kurrajong; so I thought I would get up and say a few words. I thank and acknowledge Mr Emerson and Ms Vassarotti for sponsoring these petitions. As a local member in the same electorate, these are concerns that I hear as well—and I am sure that the Labor members for Kurrajong do as well.

Downer is definitely a different area now. I do remember what it was like, because I was doing mobile offices before Goodwin was built. You can see the difference that it makes when you have these new residents coming in. Obviously, Gang Gang has expanded significantly and is one of the most popular venues in the electorate of Kurrajong, especially when it comes to live music and on the weekends. You can see a lot of families who take advantage of having Gang Gang right there, the little street library and, of course, that little courtyard and the way that it expands over into the oval. So calling for some traffic-calming measures to ensure that it is a safe place for young families is absolutely something that I do support.

In relation to Antill Street, I do not think that you can drive down that street without looking at the Dickson ovals and seeing how many Canberrans are out there, especially on the weekend playing sport. As the petition that Ms Vassarotti has sponsored states, it is important to make sure that there are safety measures in place to take care of, especially, the many children who play a lot of sport on the weekends in that area. Antill Street is one of the bigger streets as well. It is a four-lane road and does have some major traffic that goes through in both directions and at all times of the day. So this is an important petition as well. Hats off to the local residents who took the initiative to reach out to their local members and get this petition going. I know that neither of them have quite made the 500-signature mark—although I understand that Ms Vassarotti is bringing a complementary petition tomorrow—but it is important for the government to take these issues seriously, and I hope that we can get a positive response.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Human Rights, Community Services, Women, Seniors and Veterans and Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence portfolios—government priorities

Ministerial statement

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) (10.21): It is an honour to rise today, as 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 in the ACT government, and set out my priorities across the portfolios entrusted to me. I thank my colleagues for their support and guidance as I step into this role.

When I gave my first speech in this place less than two years ago, I could not have imagined then that I would be standing here today as a minister. I accept this responsibility with pride but also with a very clear understanding of what it means. A ministerial title is not the achievement, but rather it is what we do with it, how well we listen and whether the decisions we make improve people's lives. I am especially proud to be a minister from Tuggeranong and have Brindabella back at the cabinet table. The responsibilities I have been given are broad and they are deeply connected. They are about whether people can participate equally in our community and are safe at home and in their community and making sure that no Canberran is left behind, no matter their circumstances. Across these portfolios, my priorities will be to listen to those with lived experience, strengthen the services people rely on and ensure government remains accountable for the outcomes it delivers.

Canberra is proudly a human rights jurisdiction, and we have a strong Human Rights Commission with dedicated commissioners and staff. Human rights are most meaningful when people can see them in the way they are treated by public authorities and the services they receive. I will continue to work on opportunities to consider a pathway for the unresolved human rights complaints to be considered by the ACT Civil and Administrative Tribunal and the implementation of some of our new human rights, like a healthy environment and housing. I will also develop a timeline and roadmap for inclusion on the remaining economic, social and cultural rights in our ACT Human

Rights Act and what this means in the ACT context. Supporting victims of crime is an important aspect of being a human rights jurisdiction, and I will continue the work underway to simplify the administration of the Victims of Crime Scheme and the work that comes from the Statutory Review of the Charter of Rights for Victims of Crime.

As Minister for Community Services, one of my first priorities has been to meet with as many parts of the sector and to continue to strengthen the partnership between government and the community sector. Every day, community organisations support Canberrans through some of the hardest moments of their lives. I have seen how much community organisations achieve and heard about the pressures they face. Demand is rising and needs are becoming more complex. The pressure the rising cost of living is placing on households is real. The ACT government has invested around \$327 million through contracts with more than 140 non-government organisations in the 2026-27 budget. That figure demonstrates the scale and importance of our partnerships. My priority is to listen to providers, reduce unnecessary administration and ensure our investment delivers accessible and culturally safe support for Canberrans, and I am working to deliver an updated social compact with the sector and pursue reforms that support a sustainable community services system.

Part of community services also includes carers. Carers are an invaluable part of our community, and I look forward to continuing the work under the ACT Carers Strategy and announcing the final action plan soon, including work on how we can make recognition practical and not merely symbolic. I thank my predecessor Minister Orr for the work she has done in this space.

Volunteers are also a vital part of our community services, with Canberra having one of the highest rates of volunteerism in the country. Volunteers coach sports teams, respond to emergencies, care for the environment, organise festivals, serve meals, run associations and make sure people do not face hardship alone. Working with Vulnerable People checks are an important safeguard for vulnerable Canberrans and help the community sector deliver safe, trusted services. I am committed to reviewing the scheme to ensure it remains fit for purpose and aligned with nationally-agreed reforms, strengthening protections through better information-sharing, greater national consistency and more effective screening. This means government will continue to support a safe, inclusive and sustainable volunteering environment in the process.

My responsibility as Minister for Corrections sits squarely within a commitment to dignity, accountability and community safety for all. I am working with ACT Corrective Services to strengthen pathways for education, employment, health care and transition back into the community and to ensure we have appropriate supports in place for detainees with disability and complex needs. Well-planned reintegration gives people a genuine chance to rebuild their lives while also making our community safer.

We are reducing the need for strip-searching here in the ACT, with the installation of two body scanners at the AMC in 2023 and a body scanner about to come online at the Court Transport Unit shortly. The Corrective Services staff I have met so far are dedicated and professional, and supporting their safety, leadership and wellbeing is crucial in terms of having an effective and person-centred correctional system. Planning is also underway to improve health infrastructure at the Alexander Maconochie Centre, in partnership with Canberra Health Services and Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal

Health and Community Services, through the establishment of satellite health centres on the site. The government is committed to continuing to work in partnership with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community to address overrepresentation across the justice system, and I will work with my colleagues as we progress the Jumbunna review recommendations in partnership with community and deliver the Board of Inquiry into Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Deaths in Custody, scheduled to start in February 2027.

As Minister for Women, Seniors and Veterans, I want Canberra to be a place where every woman and girl can participate fully and equally, where age and experience are not a barrier but a benefit, and where our veterans and their families feel supported. The ACT has led the nation in many areas of gender equality, but progress cannot be taken for granted. Women still face gender-based violence, unequal caring responsibilities, economic insecurity, discrimination and barriers to leadership. Women hold more than half the seats in this Assembly and in the cabinet, and the ACT has continued to embed gender analysis in the budget process. These are important achievements, but representation and good policy processes must translate into better experiences in women's daily lives.

This year marks the end of the ACT Women's Plan 2016-2026. Broad and inclusive consultation, guided by the new Women's Advisory Council for Gender Equity, will shape its successor. We are providing free period products in every ACT public school and across other public facilities. A period should never be a barrier to participating in education, work or community life. Now, with the women's portfolio, I look forward to taking on the recommendations from the social policy standing committee's inquiry into endometriosis and other pelvic pain conditions that I established here last year. My own experiences will continue to inform my work. Women's voices must be heard, and the systems intended to support them must respond to the reality of their lives.

Older Canberrans and their contributions to this city should be celebrated. This month is Seniors Month and the Seniors Expo is on this week. Programs like the Silver is Gold Festival, dementia-friendly film screenings and Seniors Arts Festival all help make Canberra a place where aging does not mean becoming invisible. I want older Canberrans to have more choices, more access to services and opportunities for participation. I look forward to working with the Ministerial Advisory Council on Ageing and also contributing to national work to end the abuse and mistreatment of older people.

I recognise the service and sacrifice of current and former Australian Defence Force personnel and the experience of their families. The Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide demonstrated the urgency of reform. While most of the responsibility for veterans' policy sits outside the ACT's remit, I am committed to making sure we continue to do our part to support veterans here in Canberra. I look forward to working with the commonwealth as they work through the response to the findings of the royal commission. Our community is strongest when our people remain connected, valued, and able to contribute throughout their lives.

Nowhere is the need to listen, act and remain accountable more urgent than in preventing domestic, family and sexual violence. Every person has the right to be safe in their home, in their relationships, at work, while studying and in the wider

community. Yet violence continues to take lives, restrict freedom and cause harm that can extend across generations. This portfolio demands more than a response after violence has occurred; it requires sustained work to prevent violence, support the safety and recovery of victim-survivors, hold people who use violence to account and change the systems and attitudes that allow abuse to continue.

In May, the ACT government released the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Strategy for 2026 to 2036 and its first action plan. The 2026-27 budget invests \$47.8 million to implement that work, with \$44.2 million of that funding dedicated to strengthening our frontline services. Stable funding helps services retain skilled workers and plan beyond the next funding cycle. But funding alone will not guarantee change. We need accountability, evaluation and the courage to change course when evidence tells us something is not working. People with lived experience must help shape this work. The Victim Survivor Voices Pilot, delivered by Women's Health Matters in partnership with the Sisters in Spirit Aboriginal Corporation, has already informed the strategy and will continue to inform our work. We are developing a monitoring and evaluation framework and refreshing governance arrangements to bring together government, the specialist sector and people with lived experience.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people must remain central to the design and delivery of reform, and I look forward to working directly with the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Reference Group as we elevate its role as a ministerial advisory body. The government is implementing all 12 recommendations of *The long yarn* and investing in Aboriginal community-controlled organisations to provide crisis support, case management, advocacy, education and healing. Community-controlled responses are essential to safety, trust and lasting change.

I will continue the work begun by Minister Paterson to progress a standalone criminal offence of coercive control, and work has begun on responding to the committee's inquiry into the bill. We must also ensure the offence is implemented effectively, with the training needed to recognise patterns of coercion, avoid misidentification and support victim-survivors. The Domestic and Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme will commence in November. Supported by an updated common risk assessment and management framework, it will help services develop a consistent understanding of risk and respond earlier.

I know government does not hold all the knowledge required to solve the challenges before us. My commitment is to listen carefully; to act on evidence; to be honest about what is and is not working; to remain focused on the people of Canberra; and to work with our community partners, frontline workers, victim-survivors, public servants, statutory office holders, lived-experience advocates and everyone who wants to see our community succeed. As minister, I want to help create an ACT in which more people can be safe, be heard and participate equally—where no-one is left behind.

I present the following paper:

Ministerial priorities—Human rights, community services, corrections, women, seniors and veterans and prevention of domestic, family and sexual violence—
Ministerial statement, 22 September 2026.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi) (10.33): I want to rise and formally congratulate the minister on her appointment and to welcome the priorities she has outlined with the family, domestic and sexual violence portfolio. As she would know, this portfolio is one with particular importance to me, and I am grateful the minister has been open to engaging with me on the work in this space and I am sure that that will continue.

There are real opportunities to better protect Canberrans who are at risk of coercive control and domestic violence. My hope is that we are able to work together over the next two years to develop and implement more changes so that we can deliver better outcomes for those members of our community who are at risk of harm.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (10.34): I too wish to welcome the minister's statement, and I also congratulate her on her appointment as minister. I am looking forward to working closely with Ms Tough and her office, as is Ms Castley, on a range of matters, and she laid many of them out in her remarks this morning. Some that I am particularly interested in from today's statement include the updated social compacts with the community services sector—this is something I have heard from the sector is such a critical piece of work, and I am keen to engage on this and have indicated as much to Ms Tough, including in a meeting the week before last—as well as the Working with Vulnerable People scheme review.

This is something that has been raised with me frequently. It has been raised during my conversations regarding child safety in the early childhood sector but not only in that area; it has been raised among community sporting organisations, which rely on Working with Vulnerable People checks, and many other areas. There is a big opportunity to have a look at this, and it is critical that we do, not just to ensure that it is capturing any people who should not be successfully accessing one of these checks but to ensure that it is fit for purpose.

I recall the debate last year on the proposed fee for the Working with Vulnerable People card, which I think was a recognition that perhaps they are being overused. If around 50 per cent of the adult population has one, that is a high proportion, and it does exclude some people, including people coming out of the criminal justice system, who might be able to engage in certain opportunities from participating in those that we want to keep open.

There is an opportunity with this review to look at that aspect of it—the scope—and to make sure that the system we have in place works. For instance, in the early childhood regulatory documents that were released to the Assembly late last year, we discovered one person who had a Working with Vulnerable People card despite having been convicted of common assault of a 10-year-old in New South Wales; they were allowed to work in our early childhood education and care sector here—until they used inappropriate discipline and they were barred from the sector. That is the sort of person who should not be accessing a card.

I also note that the government, in its response to the early childhood reform motion that I brought forward earlier this year, has indicated that it is not intending to develop an online portal for checking the validity of Working with Vulnerable People cards, which every other jurisdiction in Australia has. They have indicated that that is because it would be duplicative of the work on a national workforce register for the early childhood sector, which perhaps is the case in this area. But as I indicated, in other areas, like for community sporting organisations that want to be able to check whether or not a card is valid and to do so quickly—just like we do for a car registration number—this is an important feature for them. I hope that will also be picked up by the review, and I look forward to engaging on these and many other matters in the minister’s portfolios over the coming weeks, months and years.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Integrity Commission and Statutory Office Holders—Standing Committee

Amendment to reporting date

MS LEE (Kurrajong) (10.37): I move:

That, notwithstanding standing order 174(d), the Standing Committee on the Integrity Commission and Statutory Office Holders shall present its report on the Electoral (Gambling Industry) Amendment Bill 2026 by 27 November 2026.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (10.38): I am comfortable with this motion. I understand it is to create a little bit more time for the government to attend as a witness to the committee’s inquiry, which makes sense to me. I just want to indicate my preference for the committee to report back as quickly as they can so that we can, hopefully, debate this bill in the December sitting week. I want to put that on the record so that committee members are aware of that intention. It would be fantastic to have time, if there are any proposed amendments, to be able to look at those on the back of the committee’s report.

MS LEE (Kurrajong) (10.38), in reply: I have something to add in closing and that is to put on the record that Mr Emerson is correct that in the public hearing we held earlier this month the relevant minister was not available. It is important for the committee to hear from the relevant minister, and that has been scheduled for next week, so this is to give the committee some time to ensure that we are able to hear from the minister in response to the government’s submission. That is the request for the extension. I can reassure Mr Emerson that the committee also wants to make sure that the report is finalised as soon as possible, and the committee will endeavour to do so.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Transport and City Services—Standing Committee

Amendment to reporting date

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (10.39): I move:

That, notwithstanding standing order 174(d), the Standing Committee on Transport and City Services shall present its report on the Road Transport (Alcohol

and Drugs) Amendment Bill 2026 by 6 November 2026.

Very briefly, Mr Speaker, the reporting date for this report was meant to be 16 October, so an extension to 6 November is not a rather extravagant request. The committee is committed to hearings on this issue during this month, on 30 September. I note the committee has other hearings that are open and subject to inquiry or report writing. I move the motion as presented.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Legal Affairs—Standing Committee Scrutiny report 22

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS (Brindabella) (10.40): On behalf of the chair of the committee, I present the following report:

Legal Affairs—Standing Committee (Legislative Scrutiny Role)—Scrutiny Report 22, dated 21 September 2026, together with extracts of the relevant minutes of proceedings—

I seek leave to make a brief statement.

Leave granted.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Scrutiny report No 22 contains the committee's comments on 116 pieces of subordinate legislation and proposed amendments to one bill.

The report was circulated to members when the Assembly was not sitting.

I commend the report to the Assembly.

Environment and Planning—Standing Committee Statement by chair

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (10.41): Mr Speaker, pursuant to standing order 246A, I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Environment and Planning relating to the referral of Draft Major Plan Amendment 12—Brindabella Christian College car park.

Draft Major Plan Amendment 12 was referred to the committee on 22 July 2026, pursuant to section 70 of the Planning Act 2023. The committee has resolved not to prepare a report for the Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development on DPA-12, and wishes to outline for the Assembly the reasons for this decision.

The committee notes that DPA-12 proposes a pathway for a car park to be assessed on the land despite its current PRZ1 Urban Open Space zoning. The committee further notes that the amendment would not, of itself, approve or regularise the existing car park. Any future proposal would remain subject to a development application process, through which matters such as traffic, safety, design, environmental impacts and other

planning considerations would be assessed on their merits.

In reaching its decision the committee had regard for the fact that the circumstances giving rise to DPA-12 have already been the subject of extensive consideration through ACAT and ongoing court proceedings. The committee notes that any decision on DPA-12 could be superseded by future court decisions and has urged the minister to take caution in taking any steps before a final outcome is reached in the courts.

The committee is currently undertaking a self-referred inquiry into the use of controlled activity orders. The terms of reference for that inquiry include consideration of action taken under chapter 12 of the Planning Act 2023, as well as the enforcement of lease conditions in relation to several sites, including the Brindabella Christian College car park site.

As part of that inquiry the committee will examine whether there are broader systemic issues relating to the effectiveness of controlled activity order provisions and government enforcement of lease conditions in ensuring maintenance of facilities, compliance with crown leases, and preventing unauthorised developments.

Accordingly, the committee has determined that a separate inquiry into DPA-12 would be unlikely to add materially to the scrutiny already provided through existing planning, legal and parliamentary processes. Further, the information already available makes it clear that approving DPA-12 would act as a concerning precedent which, in effect, retrospectively approves the unapproved development of public unleased land. It could send a signal that the ACT government tolerates and rewards noncompliance with lease conditions and the planning system.

Statement by chair

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (10.43): Pursuant to standing order 246A, I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Environment and Planning 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 eight appointments and re-appointments to the following bodies:

- ACT Heritage Council
- Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment
- Suburban Land Agency Board
- City Renewal Authority Board.

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

Environment and Planning—Standing Committee—Schedule of Statutory Appointments—11th Assembly—Period 1 January to 30 June 2026.

Integrity Commission and Statutory Office Holders—Standing Committee

Statement by chair

MS LEE (Kurrajong) (10.44): Mr Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 246A, I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on the Integrity Commission and Statutory Office Holders, relating to its inquiry into the Electoral (Gambling Industry) Amendment Bill 2026.

Pursuant to standing order 259, the committee is seeking to acquaint the Assembly with evidence given by Mr Thomas Emerson MLA at the public hearing on 10 September 2026 where he stated that:

Standing order 278 reflects on the Assembly's power to adjudge and deal with contempts to provide reasonable protection for the Assembly and its committees and for members against improper acts tending substantially to obstruct them in the performance of their functions.

The Labor Party member of this committee has provided false information to witnesses about the nature of the bill, claiming multicultural groups and community organisations like Active Democracy Bean would be captured by it. The bill only captures donations to political entities defined on page 2. It does not capture donations, including providing free facilities use to community organisations, as witnesses have been led to believe by Mr Werner-Gibblings. His remarks have deliberately confused witnesses about the nature of the legislation and in doing so, I would argue, have substantially obstructed the committee's inquiry into the bill today. I ask the Chair to review Mr Werner-Gibblings lines of questioning and consider whether he is in contempt of the Assembly by misleading witnesses about the scope of the bill.

The committee also notes the following comment from Mr Taimus Werner-Gibblings, at the same hearing:

I accept Mr Emerson's comments about my interpretation of the impacts of his amendment, noting that the ultimate arbiter of the impact of a bill would be a judicial officer. If my interpretation is wrong down the track or even now, then I unhesitatingly apologise and withdraw those comments.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (10.46), by leave: I did want to reflect on this, which I thought was of concern, as did witnesses who I have spoken with since the hearings. Members will be aware that this bill proposes to ban donations from gambling industry entities to political entities like MLAs and political parties. Captured in that ban are in-kind contributions, including free facility use, which was a subject that was covered to a significant extent during the hearings.

I note ACT Labor made a submission to the inquiry indicating that they would wish to see an exemption for free facilities use from the proposed ban, given their use of clubs containing poker machines for branch meetings. I think they indicated 10 to 15 branch meetings a month. This would have a financial impact on them. There is an argument that they can fund that otherwise, using the administrative funding provided by taxpayers for them to run their party.

The point of this issue, or my concern here, is that witnesses were being either deliberately or carelessly misled because of Mr Werner-Gibblings—the Labor Party member of the committee—and his clear misinterpretation of the scope of the bill.

Multiple witnesses were essentially told that they would be captured; community organisations would be captured by this bill despite not being political entities. Active Democracy Bean and the Canberra Alliance for Participatory Democracy were told, for instance, “Your meetings would be covered.” They were told that all in-kind donations to political groups from community clubs that also operate poker machines would be charged at commercial rates and this “would mean that organisations such as yours would need to pay for space to meet together or hold constituent meetings, or just to gather collectively when they are talking about political things.”

This is the preamble to questioning witnesses regarding whether they support the bill. They are being told “You will be captured by it”—which is false if you read the second page of the bill which says, “Political entities will be captured by it”—and then asked, “Well, what do you think? Is this something that you would still support?”

This put witnesses, in this example, volunteers, in a very uncomfortable position to have to make a judgment as to whether they would be captured when, clearly, they would not.

The Canberra Gambling Reform Alliance was also told—Mr Werner-Gibbings indicated:

I am just trying to determine the impact the legislation as it currently is would have—and probably negative—in terms of the ability to host events or hold meetings for community councils, multicultural groups, political parties and sports clubs, which could all have the ability to attempt to try to influence political policy. That would be an intended consequence of this bill. That is not an unintended consequence. If those organisations are captured and required to pay full rate, then that is the point.

That is not the point of the bill, and it is not what the bill does.

So, this is of concern, I think, and it had a serious impact on the conduct of those hearings throughout that day of the inquiry, to actually deliberate about specific details of the bill. Some of these remarks are more remarks a witness would give than a member asking questions and trying to get to the bottom of it.

In raising this concern in the committee and again here in the Assembly, I think it is important to acknowledge the power dynamic at play in a committee room. One side of the room has the legislators who are making legislation and, in this case, telling them what that legislation would do. On the other side of the table, in this case, these were all volunteer organisations being told what the legislation would do incorrectly and then being asked to form a judgment on that basis.

It is very hard for a witness in that case to push back on the people on the legislator side of the table to say, “No, I do not think that is how the bill works.” And certainly, how it came across in the hearing was that the Labor Party member of the committee was essentially running interference for ACT Labor, to peddle the view that was contained in their submission as to what they want to see out of this inquiry and this legislation.

I have a concern with that. And as Ms Lee remarked, standing order 27A reflects on the Assembly’s power to adjudge and deal with contempt and that this should be used to

provide reasonable protection for the Assembly and its committees against improper acts, tending substantially to obstruct them in the performance of their functions.

I am not intending to pursue this matter further, but I think it is very difficult to argue that the committee was not obstructed in the performance of its functions, by virtue of a member of the committee asking witnesses if they would support the bill, if it did something that the bill does not do—and that page 2 of the bill clearly indicates it does not do. So, I think this was disappointing, and I hope that any findings, recommendations, evidence used by the committee is aware of this dynamic that was implied in those hearings, and that it is addressed in any future hearings of that committee, as well.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS (Brindabella) (10.51), by leave: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. Thank you, Mr Emerson for his comments. I understand where he is coming from.

There is an extreme difference between what is said deliberately and what is an interpretation of the act of how a bill might act. When it is only a bill at this stage, how it is going to be interpreted and who it impacts would eventually be determined by a judiciary.

Now, you say it is very, very clear on the second page. Perhaps, on second reading, it is. However, if I was wrong in my interpretation, I apologise about that and, as I said at the time, I withdraw those statements. But when I was reading it and I was asking those questions, it was my understanding of how the bill was going to impact clubs.

There was, sort of, a lot of pejorative language in your statement about pedalling a position, and how use of the contempt in this way would impact upon a member's ability to ask whatever question they thought was important, or to assess or try and interrogate whatever issue they thought was necessary to get useful information, to be better able to make a decision. I think that is difficult.

I would be interested to see, as well, without a ruling, once again, how a contempt on how a member asks questions in a committee, how that impacts privilege and the rights and responsibilities and obligations of a member to carry out their work.

But I take on board the general sense of Mr Emerson's issue with how my question came across. And if down the track it is inaccurate, I apologise, and I will withdraw it at that stage. I understand where you are coming from.

Appropriation Bill 2026-2027

[Cognate bill: Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill 2024-2025]

Detail stage

Schedule 1—Appropriations—Proposed expenditure.

City and Environment Directorate—Part 1.4

Debate resumed from 17 September 2026.

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (10.54): Mr Speaker, when the sum total of residential rates collected in the ACT in the year 25-26 is less than the total interest on government debt, it is no wonder that our city services are in decline; because there is no money to spend to maintain our community. There is inadequate money to spend, to maintain our community.

Canberrans are paying increasingly high residential rates. Not one dollar of that is going to service because it is required, as is a bit more, to pay interest on government debt. That is not a responsible government, in my opinion, Mr Speaker.

We see this evidenced in so many ways. 125,000 Sunday visits to libraries no longer possible. Properly resourcing libraries, instead of doing that, they cut hours and they do not say it is to do with the budget, it is to do with reform and staff welfare. But clearly, resourcing and budgets do affect service delivery.

The CIT seniors' fitness class at Bruce, from a collection of six people, up to over 200: cut, denying our ageing population a social connection, a physical activity and access to a gym being lost. Again, resourcing and budget inadequacies mean loss of service.

Streetlights: 460 faults outstanding for more than 90 days, some stretching back years. Lack of resourcing and budget funding means a loss of service. Our streets in part of our city are unsafe to be at night, and provide an opportunity for crime, because the lights are not on.

Two summers of failure to keep the Big Splash, this very beloved aquatic park in Belconnen; the government's very tardy action on that. They just cannot afford to keep a big aquatic centre supported, and to act more promptly, at least, on the owners, who have been negligent in not using the land for its stated purpose.

Hawker's tennis centre, similarly: over a decade lost of a well-used tennis centre where hundreds would play during the week in an outdoor activity that we should be encouraging, particularly in our digital age. Unavailable to the community because of government inaction, lack of resourcing, budget failure.

The rise of illegally dumped material and the tardiness in tidying it up: lack of resourcing, budget failure.

So, Mr Speaker, there is certainly a long list of things that the government is not managing well, including a proper audit of the seatbelt monitoring system, the camera system, the AI system, let alone the fact that it cannot actually run the law on this correctly, in the first place.

So, when the government cannot manage the money entrusted to it by the community—entrusted to it to provide benefits to them—you do wonder: do they deserve to hold their jobs?

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (10.58): There are some things the Greens are really happy about in the budget this year for the environment, as well as some massive mistakes. I will start with the good stuff, although that is somewhat mixed.

It is good to see there is \$150,000 allocated for weed control. It is not enough. In our connected world, the threat of introduced species is an ongoing one, and \$150,000 buys us a little extra vigilance, but only a little, as does the commitment to four years of funding for our biosecurity response. With bird flu now confirmed, not only on Australia's shores but as close as Goulburn, I would have liked to see more funding for actively protecting our native bird and mammal species in the face of the bird flu threat ramping up. I have a real fear that this line item in the budget may need a lot of upward adjustment over the next few years. I asked about this in question time last week. There is very limited local response here. Many people in our community are worried for our wildlife, and I share their concerns.

It is good to see funding of \$540,000, over three years, for community environment groups. ACT Wildlife, Landcare ACT and the National Parks Association all do vital work, often with a massive contribution from volunteers. On that note, we need to do a much better job of recognising and respecting that government funding is very often what sustains volunteer participation. People in Canberra are happy to give their time to a cause or an activity they love, but it takes resources to organise those volunteers. The return on every dollar invested in supporting these kinds of volunteer-staffed organisations is enormous. The government is shooting itself in the foot if it does not seed that money at a generous level.

This brings me to one of the glaring negatives in the environment budget, which is the government's treatment of our catchment groups. These groups were just put through an appalling tender process with no justification, and I am speaking with care when I say that. I explicitly asked for the principles and for the justification before the procurement began, at a point when the minister could have spoken about the decision-making process without interfering in any procurement process because there was not one on foot. The minister refused to answer questions at that time. She said she had not made a decision so she could not speak about it. As soon as she had made a decision, that decision was executed, and then I could not get any answers because there was an active procurement under way. So again, the minister could not speak about it.

Documents I received under FOI show that the minister was told that an uplift of funding for the environment organisations would be appropriate. There was no uplift in funding. I have read the procurement approach to market and the request types. There are clearly set out exemptions in the government procurement regulations where there may be an exemption if there is only one supplier, or a limited number of suppliers, who can supply a particular good or service because a supplier with specialist knowledge or equipment is required. That was not applied in this case. I do not know why and the minister will not answer questions during a procurement. I do not know if we will get answers further down the track. I will continue to ask questions further down the track.

The government brief gave two options: continue current arrangements or go through an open procurement process. The minister picked the recommendation of an open procurement process. I have not been able to get answers about that either. The best we got in estimates was that the option the minister picked complied with the law. I still do not know, as of this day, if the other option in that government brief did not comply with the law. It looks like it does by my read. There are exemptions that apply. If it did

not comply with the law, I do not understand why it was in a brief in the first place as a viable option.

The catchment groups were put through a brand new tender process and it seems to be a pretty unusual tender process. There were no performance issues flagged; the government simply decided that those organisations needed to operate more efficiently, and they wanted these small community organisations to compete in a public tender for their own turf, so to speak, to maintain our grasslands. Two separate processes were run. One has been resolved, and the second, I understand, is still underway. The net effect appears to be that the catchment groups have not been selected as preferred providers for the new contracts.

Those environmental organisations are the backbone of environmental protection here in the ACT. They do the hard work. They have been operating here for decades. They have thousands of volunteers. If they cease to operate as a result of these government decisions, it is an enormous loss to the territory and to our environment.

Environment-focused volunteering provides an estimated \$21.5 million of free labour each year for government. That was the finding and a recommendation from the former Commissioner for Sustainability. Many of those organisations have been government partners in habitat restoration work for a long time, and after years of partnership and good-faith engagement, they have been repaid with a structural refunding process that has not yet been explained and that prioritises efficiency over all of the other benefits volunteer organisations provide.

It does look like an unusual tender process. According to a question I asked in estimates, the timeline of the procurement ran like this: in September last year, the government put out a request for expressions of interest from local not-for-profit community organisations. This moved to stage 2, request for project proposal, and the successful REOI suppliers were invited to submit a detailed project proposal in November. The suppliers—the catchment groups—were advised they were unsuccessful on 30 March. On that same day, on 30 March, a select tender process was started with five not-for-profit local community organisations, including the three catchment groups who were unsuccessful.

So to recap, an open procurement was done first. The organisations who were the only ones providing the service were the only ones who applied. They were found unsuccessful. Then on the same day they were found unsuccessful, the government started a select tender process, to the same unsuccessful groups and to two other organisations. The government did not pause. The government did not do a “lessons learned” period to work out what went wrong that led to their first unsuccessful process. They simply ran it again, immediately, with no reflection. I find that unusual. I am hoping that our regulators are watching this because the whole episode is unusual and a lot of people are now watching unusual procurement processes in Canberra.

Now regarding Canberra’s Western Edge, I am pleased to see that all of the studies that have been listed as needing to be finished, have been completed. I thank the planning minister for providing his statement update recently on the urban growth boundary, which contains a lot of information about the Western Edge and Eastern Broadacre as well. I am still puzzled as to why that report sets out 37 completed studies, all of the

studies that we think that need to be completed, but says that there are still studies ongoing in the Western Edge area. What are the ongoing studies that still need to be done in the Western Edge area? What more do we need to know before we can move ahead and protect the environment in that area?

The Western Edge will form part of the urban growth boundary which the government has agreed to implement. I am hopeful that by June next year the amendment to the Territory Plan will be released to establish that urban boundary. The urban growth boundary is a better way of looking at how we control urban development. It goes hand-in-hand with the government's ongoing focus on creating a more compact city. Making better use of the existing urban area makes so much sense, it puts people near shops, jobs, public transport, community facilities and open spaces. It lets us make better use of the existing infrastructure. It makes it cheaper for people to access those services and it creates a more liveable and inclusive city.

Spreading Canberra's footprint places pressure on our high value environmental and ecological areas for which Canberra is renowned. It also means longer commute times for people getting to work or to the services they need. It means high climate emissions. It means supplying more facilities and infrastructure, which is why the cost of building in greenfield areas is so much more for government than the cost of building in established urban areas.

Similarly, the Eastern Broadacre Strategic Assessment is being progressed, which, like the Western Edge, has been subject to extensive investigation. This area also addresses particularly complex issues associated with land that is high value for farming purposes, with the ongoing demand for industrial land. As with the Western Edge, the Eastern Broadacre studies have been complex and have taken a long time. The length of time has impacted on the currency of the information, with the National Environment Protection Agency requiring further studies because the data and research presented to them was not current. We trust that additional work for Eastern Broadacre will be finalised shortly. I am disappointed that we are not getting clearer commitments about protection for these areas of conservation value this term, protection and the resourcing for that protection. Protection of the Western Edge and all of our key habitat and green-space areas within our footprint is essential.

Earlier this year the government released the draft Nature Conservation Strategy, and it is a good strategy. It plans to map all the priority conservation areas beyond the reserves by 2026. That is the end of this year. But it does not have those areas set down for legislative protection until 2029. That is next term and three years away. We cannot understand what happens in those three years when we have mapped all those areas and we know where we need to protect. If the government has completed all of that mapping work, surely they can have the protection measures in place—the actual way that we will look after these areas, look after these species, look after these habitats—by the end of this term. Delaying key protection until 2029 or later is unnecessary. We may lose species by then. We may lose endangered habitats by then. The draft Nature Conservation Strategy also contains an assumption. That assumption is—

(Second speaking period taken.)

Delaying this key protection until 2029 or later is unnecessary and we will lose species

by then. The draft Nature Conservation Strategy contains an assumption. The assumption is, and I quote, “the government has an appetite to allocate budget for needs outside of business as usual to deliver actions of the strategy over 10 years.” That means that these areas need resourcing, additional resourcing, in order to protect them. I cannot see funding outside of business as usual in this budget. We are very much hoping it is in future budgets. The government’s intention is good here. The Greens agree with the Labor government’s intention, but we need firm commitment to delivery, we need legislative follow-through and we need resourcing to protection.

In terms of building a circular economy, I am again really frustrated with how long this is taking. I am frustrated with how long it is taking to get our new Materials Recovery Facility up and running. And we have just, in the last couple of weeks, found out that the federal Labor government has abandoned publicly all plans for national product stewardship. That means that the lines the ACT government has been running for six years—which are: we do not need to worry about designing out problematic waste; we do not need to worry about packaging waste; the federal government is going to make industry stop creating waste that we cannot recycle; the federal government will deal with this; the federal government will make industry pay for this; and this is not a problem for our local facilities—the federal Labor government has just publicly abandoned those plans.

The federal Labor government has done that despite the fact that the industry themselves has begged the government to bring in national regulation. This has left every state to scurry around and try to deal with packaging waste that the federal government is quite happy for the endless production of, endless disposal of and endless pollution into our natural environment and into our physical bodies, from that plastic pollution.

ACT government, now that you know your federal government has abandoned these plans, it is up to you to make sure that your local recycling facilities can deal with this problem. I am very upset for you that your federal Labor counterparts have abandoned their responsibilities after a decade of pledging that they will follow through. But now that they have publicly made that statement, you need to make sure that our recycling facilities can cope with the waste that will come out of our supermarkets.

I am also really upset about our slow progress on FOGO. We did not even get an update from the minister on this. I accidentally discovered this in the middle of an estimates hearing when I was asking, as I do every year, where are we up to on FOGO. It was committed to be delivered in 2023, and then 2026, and then 2028, and we found out in estimates that it will now be 2030. That timeline has been pushed out again.

Canberra has well and truly lost the chance to lead the way on this nationally. I do not understand why this is so difficult for Labor. I have heard the reasons that there is a procurement going on, but we have so many different ways of solving this problem and there are so many states and councils that have already solved this problem.

There are companies right now who are closing down, or have already closed down, their businesses because they cannot wait for a contract. There are organisations that are pitching cheaper ways to do this with local councils. There are people who are time poor, or are living in places like apartments, where they do not have access to compost.

They are topping up their bins every week with compostable kitchen waste that is going straight to landfill. It is releasing methane. It is locking away valuable nutrients that should be going back into our soils. Food waste that goes into landfill in 2030 will still be making climate pollution in 2050. That means for our 2045 climate targets—we have just not worried about those—we are still generating waste right now and we are locking that in until 2030 to 2050 and beyond. I cannot understand why commitments made in 2020, for 2023, could not be delivered before now.

I am a pragmatist and I have come up with a lot of different alternatives. We could also use education. We can also do trials to see if there are other techniques, such as aerated compost, which is what is being used in a lot of other local councils and state governments. There are many ways to solve this problem but I am really worried that we will get to 2028, and I will be asking again in a routine estimates how are we going on that, and we will find out, now it is 2035.

I would also like to make a few comments about the planning components of the budget. It was only a few months ago when the missing middle reforms passed through the Assembly. The Greens were pleased to see those reforms come through the Assembly and become available for the community to implement. I understand that the take-up to date has been modest. That is as expected. The Greens have long advocated for an increase in density and for an urban growth boundary. We need to protect our environment and at the same time, we need to stop our city expanding outwards. Missing middle housing and more density within our footprint are needed so Canberrans can get more homes closer to shops, public transport, jobs and community facilities. This will give us better houses in the right locations.

The government has committed funding to establish a Canberra House Pattern Book. That initiative has been introduced in New South Wales and it covers both low-rise and mid-rise three to six storey apartment buildings. In the ACT these plans will be developed following a design competition, and no planning approval will be required. They are architect designed homes, so that should ensure good design is front and centre of considerations. The ACT Greens support proactive and innovative proposals that help speed up approvals and the construction of homes. We do acknowledge that while one design might fit one site, it will not necessarily fit another site. So we will watch how the House Pattern Book initiative progresses with care.

There is also funding to progress a review into the lease variation charges. The government has already put in place time limited LVC remissions that are designed to encourage the uptake of missing middle housing. The government has also announced a review into the operation of lease variation charges. This is the third such review in the last 17 years, which shows this is a really contested space. The ACT Greens are supportive of the initial changes and of the review. We consider that any increase in land value needs to demonstrate a really clear community benefit.

The Greens have been supportive of these missing middle reforms. We took a strong policy to the election and then we led the first motion at the start of this term to get them going. It is good to see the budget allocating further funding to progress the work necessary to improve the supply of diverse housing in our existing suburbs. While we are supportive of the development of housing, I should be clear that the ACT Greens remain focused on the impact of these changes from a climate change and

environmental perspective. At the moment, the ACT is going backwards on tree canopy cover. We need to make sure that everybody in these homes has access to good quality greenspace and open space and that our urban heat island effect is not getting worse.

The Belconnen district has the largest share of population in the ACT. In 2021, we had the highest proportion of rental households in rental stress. According to the district strategies, the Inner North, City and Belconnen districts are expected to accommodate a significant share of new medium and high-density development. Belconnen will continue to be Canberra's most populous district but we are well down the list of having high-quality public transport services. People who live in these areas need those services so they can live good lives. People, particularly on low incomes, need those services and they need them accessible.

We also need to make sure that we are factoring in public housing. I am really pleased that the planning minister has repeatedly stated a commitment to inclusionary zoning. We do need to make sure that we are getting clear targets in that, and, in all of these decisions that we are making in a rapidly developing Canberra, in areas like the entire Thoroughbred Park precinct, that we are getting enough public housing. It is not acceptable to have a couple of public homes and then just build in the rest as affordable market housing—that no one can, in actual fact, afford—and that is not part of the government's asset books. We need long term stable, secure funding for public housing and we really should be committing to areas like Thoroughbred Park precinct, making sure at least 10 per cent of those homes are public housing.

MS LEE (Kurrajong) (11.18): I rise to speak on Appropriation Bill 2026-2027 as it relates to the environment and climate change portfolios. Climate change remains one of the most significant challenges facing our community, our environment and our economy. Taking meaningful action is essential if we are to safeguard future generations, protect our natural environment and ensure our economy remains strong and resilient. For those reasons, the commitment to achieving net zero emissions by 2045 remains an important goal. It provides certainty for industry, supports investment and innovation, and helps ensure the transition to a lower emissions future is orderly, sustainable and achievable.

But real progress on climate change requires more than ambitious targets; it requires practical action, measurable outcomes and genuine engagement with the people and industries who will be required to deliver the change. We must support innovation that allows businesses to transition at a realistic pace, providing them with the tools, incentives and flexibility they need to adopt cleaner technologies without compromising their viability. Equally, we must ensure that individuals and families, particularly those already struggling with rising living costs, are not left behind to carry the burden of decisions made by government.

It is because of the seriousness of this challenge that so many Canberrans were disappointed when the minister finally released her long-awaited Climate Change Strategy. After years of waiting, the strategy reads less like a concrete roadmap and more like an announcement for future announcements. Of the 16 milestones identified, nine are simply the future release of further reports, plans, strategies or reviews. At some point, government must stop announcing intentions and start delivering outcomes. The strategy offers little certainty about how the ACT will achieve its targets, how

success will be measured or how taxpayers can hold the government accountable when milestones are missed. Unfortunately, this reflects a broader pattern from the minister.

There are ultimately two pathways to achieving net zero by 2045. The first is an accountable, measurable and evidence based pathway built on clear actions, scientific assessment and realistic planning. The second is a pathway built on aspirations, vague commitments and future reports. Seemingly, the minister's approach is to write her way to net zero, but words alone will not deliver. Canberrans deserve better.

We know this government has already failed to meet its own interim climate targets, yet, rather than explaining how these targets will be brought back on track, the minister's strategy simply pushes many of the difficult decisions further into the future. The lack of detail is particularly concerning given the questions raised during estimates about the funding required to implement the strategy. Stakeholders have rightly asked where the investment is, what the priorities are and how progress will be measured. To date, those questions remain largely unanswered.

A recurring theme throughout this portfolio is the minister's apparent unwillingness to genuinely engage with stakeholders before major decisions are made. Whether it is environmental groups, community organisations, volunteers or industry stakeholders, we continue to hear the same concerns, including that consultation occurs too late, feedback is ignored and decisions appear to have already been made before discussions even begin. The people working on the ground often have the greatest understanding of what is working, what is not and where government resources can be best directed, yet too often this government views consultation as a box-ticking exercise rather than an opportunity to improve outcomes.

We cannot afford to be reactive. We must stay ahead of the emerging environmental challenges. Worryingly, we heard in estimates that, despite New South Wales recently completing a comprehensive assessment of microplastic contamination across its waterways, the minister confirmed that the ACT has not undertaken a similar study and currently has no plans to do so. More concerning, the minister appeared unaware that the work had even been undertaken in New South Wales. Governments cannot afford to wait until problems become crises before paying attention. It is the responsibility of the minister to remain informed about emerging challenges and identify opportunities to learn from the work being done in other jurisdictions.

We also heard earlier about the government's response to the emerging threat of bird flu. The minister highlighted the \$5.28 million allocated for biosecurity measures in this year's budget. However, as the minister herself acknowledged, that funding supports the territory's broader biosecurity response and is not specifically dedicated to addressing the current threat of bird flu. While signage, guidance material and online information are useful measures, they do not amount to the comprehensive public awareness campaign that this situation warrants.

Bird flu is a fast-moving disease. With detections occurring in wild birds near Goulburn, the risk is very real and very close to home. We cannot afford to be reactive. Canberrans should know what bird flu is, what symptoms to watch for, how it could affect poultry, pets and wildlife, and who to contact if they encounter a potentially infected animal. That requires proactive communication through traditional media,

social media, community groups and direct engagement with those most likely to come in contact with affected wildlife.

The same concerns about delivery and consultation arise in relation to nature conservation. When asked during estimates about the long-awaited Nature Conservation Strategy, the minister stated that the strategy is expected to be released in the final quarter of 2026, yet she also confirmed that no specific funding has been allocated to implement it. That raises an obvious question: how seriously can a strategy be taken if no funding has been identified to deliver it? A strategy without implementation is simply a document.

We also learned about the reduction in funding for local catchment groups following a deeply worrying procurement process. These groups undertake valuable environmental work across the ACT. They are supported by dedicated volunteers who contribute countless hours of their own time to improve our environment, yet funding decisions were made with little transparency, little consultation and little regard for the impact on those organisations and volunteers. There remain serious questions for the minister to answer about that process.

I also want to touch on this government's ongoing failures to deliver on FOGO and the fact that we have been led down the garden path—pun intended—on this important process. As Ms Clay pointed out, this has been implemented in many councils. At one point, the ACT was leading the way when it came to the important step of giving households the opportunity and the ownership of making sure that they do well with their household waste, yet we seem to keep falling further and further behind. As Ms Clay also pointed out, we have been given yet another protracted broken promise of a delivery time—once again into the future, the never-never.

The consistent thread running through this portfolio is a failure to engage, a failure to consult and, too often, a failure to deliver. Canberrans support strong environmental outcomes. They support practical action on climate change. They support conservation and responsible stewardship of our natural environment. What they expect in return is leadership, transparency and accountability. Unfortunately, this budget falls short of that standard, and this minister's approach continues to leave too many stakeholders feeling ignored, too many questions unanswered, and too much of the real work deferred to some future strategy, review or report.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (11.26): I rise to speak on the City and Environment Directorate's 2026-27 appropriation. This budget highlights the continuing lack of strategic planning for the future of our city. The ACT government appears to be relying on the private sector to determine how Canberra grows in our town centres and group centres, rather than undertaking genuine town planning, identifying sites for social infrastructure and building community infrastructure that makes neighbourhoods great places to live. District strategies are not town planning documents. They do not provide the level of certainty residents expect or the critical infrastructure they need.

One area of growing concern is the future of burials in southern Canberra, which has been planned and talked about for over a decade. Budget papers note that development of Southern Memorial Park will only proceed once funding is approved. At the same time, the Cemeteries and Crematoria Authority's statement of intent states that it will

investigate the possibility of expanding Woden Cemetery or applying for its closure. The delay in delivering the new southern interment options is itself identified as a strategic risk.

I am concerned that, without a funded pathway to deliver Southern Memorial Park, expansion of Woden Cemetery into Eddison Park may become the default response to a lack of burial capacity. As Woden's population grows, access to open green space and recreation facilities becomes increasingly important. If we are serious about creating a compact city, we should be ensuring we get the best out of our land in our town centres for future generations while progressing appropriate long-term burial infrastructure at the Southern Memorial Park site.

Active travel infrastructure is another area where the government needs greater ambition. We still have no clear commitment, timeline or funding pathway for the missing Woden to Civic cycleway connection. Treating this as a subsidiary project of light rail stage 2B risks delaying delivery for another decade. Canberra cannot afford to wait that long. Safe and direct active travel routes are essential to reducing congestion and transport emissions while improving community health and wellbeing.

Transport planning must also take a more holistic approach. We need end-to-end planning for the Cotter Road, improved safety at Amberfield and planning for the Mint Interchange. I am concerned about the decision to relocate Access Canberra into the Woden Library without consultation and without a clear understanding of the impact on library users.

I also want to address the future of West Plaza in the heart of Woden. This space sits alongside the new CIT campus and was designed as a civic destination—a place where students, workers and residents can gather, attend events, enjoy markets and spend time in a vibrant public environment. If we want the plaza to succeed, it must remain focused on people, not vehicles. While the government's response to the petition refers to pedestrian priorities and traffic calming measures, it does not adequately explain why a through road is needed in the centre of what is intended to be a public gathering space.

Good town planning should not encourage more traffic in the heart of our town centres. We can provide accessible parking, drop-off areas and convenient access nearby without compromising the integrity of the plaza itself. The opportunity before us is to create a genuine civic heart for Woden, and that means prioritising people, accessibility and placemaking over vehicle movements. We need dog parks in Woden and Molonglo. We do not have them. Residents need clarity about whether land will be reserved and funding will be provided for scarce public land that is allocated to other options. Weston Creek needs playground, path and shop upgrades. Let's get Fisher shops on the upgrade list.

Turning to the environment, I look forward to the technical work and the options for naturalising Yarralumla Creek that will be released later this year. With respect to the tender for the ParkCare stewardship and education programs, a key concern with the procurement process is that the government has not clearly demonstrated why replacing the three established catchment groups with a single provider was the best option for delivering stewardship and education programs.

While the government cites governance, procurement and value-for-money considerations, it has confirmed that no independent financial modelling was undertaken and has not released any formal evaluation comparing alternative delivery models. There are also concerns that the procurement process did not adequately recognise the value of volunteer networks, local knowledge, community relationships, and decades of experience built up by the catchment groups. These assets are central to the success of programs such as ParkCare and Waterwatch, yet it remains unclear how potential losses to volunteer participation, local expertise and community capacity were assessed.

More broadly, questions remain about transparency and accountability. The government has not explained the criteria that were used to determine that the new model will deliver superior outcomes, nor has it identified how success will be measured after implementation. Without a clear evaluation framework, it is difficult to determine whether the procurement process will ultimately deliver better environmental, community and value-for-money outcomes for the ACT.

One of the challenges in assessing the CED budget is the lack of visibility of whether expenditure is delivering the best outcomes. While the budget reports on activities and performance measures, it provides limited information about the evaluation of programs, their cost-effectiveness or whether funding is being directed to the highest-value initiatives. At a time of growing fiscal pressure, the government should be undertaking regular evaluations of expenditure to determine what is working, what is not working, and where resources could be re-allocated to better achieve outcomes for the community.

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (11.32): I rise in my capacity as ACT Greens spokesperson for water. There is some sparkle and fizz in this year's budget allocation for Lake Tuggeranong water: \$2.71 million over four years. This is not all new funding, however. A lot of it is part of the existing ACT Healthy Waterways program, launched under my former colleague and the previous minister, Shane Rattenbury. I very much hope to see current and future ministers keeping the tap open for future flows of commonwealth funding. Our position near the top of what is arguably Australia's most important catchment area means that the benefits of such funding heading downstream will be well beyond the ACT border, and this ought to give us a strong case to get more money filtering through. So let's not rest our paddles in the boat; let's keep rowing.

Meanwhile, I want to spell out all the good things. The budget secures additional street-sweeping to decrease leaf litter running into the lake from stormwater drains. This is something that the ACT Greens have been calling for for a while. This will also reduce the cost of maintaining and cleaning existing pollution traps. There will be a trial of anti-algal technologies which will hopefully contribute to the general fund of knowledge on how to keep urban lakes and ponds healthy across Australia and globally. I am especially interested in the proposed behavioural change program for households to reduce practices that harm water quality and the consumer education program that will help people understand what is actually involved in keeping Lake Tuggeranong clean.

Frankly, the more people who care about this stuff the better. Again, this could have broader implications than just Lake Tuggeranong's water quality. In a whole range of

areas, the global sustainability challenges of climate change, ecosystem damage, biodiversity loss and all the rest are going to mean that governments urgently need to find ways to get more public buy-in on taking action. How do we do that? Is it about appealing to people's self-interest? Are there ways that we can connect this kind of behaviour change action to other benefits, like reducing social isolation and improving health, fitness and wellbeing? Once again, Canberra has an opportunity to be a laboratory with ideas and results that other jurisdictions can learn from.

Bringing us back to the detail, the water efficiency program looks to have been allocated around \$7 million over the next two years. This will facilitate replacement of inefficient household tapware, yielding flow-on benefits to households by reducing their water bills. It will also improve irrigation systems at sportsgrounds and fund water management activities at businesses, schools and government facilities. I am glad to see that regulatory changes will be looked at too, to see if there are ways that new builds can incorporate greater water efficiency.

The best way to make positive change in any community is to ensure that the community itself is educated and motivated. In a high percentage of cases where people perceive that they have an ownership stake and a contribution to give, they start to care more. From the bottom of my heart, I really hope that we will see this play out as Canberrans—especially my constituents around Lake Tuggeranong—become more aware of what is being done, what is at stake, and what they can do to help.

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (11.35): Canberrans are paying the highest residential rates of any city in the country. The average rates in each and every suburb in the ACT—from Red Hill to Richardson—are now higher than Sydney's wealthy northern beaches, and people from across Canberra are frustrated. They are frustrated because, when we look around us, the signs of neglect are visible right across our city, both figuratively and literally. Canberrans are asking themselves some very simple questions. They are asking themselves: "What are we getting for the thousands and thousands of dollars that we pay every year? Are we getting value for money?" People across Canberra are asking, "With this massive rates bill, are the roads better than other cities? Are the footpaths pristine? Are they unbroken and safe? Are the shopping centres clean and well-maintained?"—and they are right to ask.

They are right to ask, "What are we getting in exchange for the massive rates rises Labor has chosen to inflict on every Canberran?" Rates in Canberra are astronomical, and they are growing. The estimates committee highlighted that the real rates increase is—despite Labor's spin—eight per cent this year. In my electorate of Murrumbidgee here are a few examples: Curtin is going up around nine per cent; Garran, around a 10 per cent increase; Hughes, around a nine per cent increase; O'Malley, an 11 per cent increase; Pearce, an eight per cent increase; Wright, a nine per cent increase; and Yarralumla has an 11 per cent increase in the rates that they are going to be paying this year.

North Sydney Council says its average residential rates were around \$1,076 in 2025-26. Mosman was around \$1,762. I think people across Canberra would be thrilled if their rates bills were that low. Of course, the ACT and New South Wales fund local services a bit differently—so it is not a perfect apples-to-apples comparison. But, when a home owner in Richardson is paying more than some of the most expensive suburbs on

Sydney's North Shore, you had better be delivering.

I acknowledge Labor likes to say that we are different because the ACT condenses local government and state government functions into a single level. But that should be a driver of efficiency and innovation, not an excuse. If you talk to people in Woden, Weston Creek, Molonglo and the inner south, all across my electorate, and ask them whether they feel that they are getting value for money, I guarantee they are going to tell you what they think. Ask the residents of Pearce, who have been tripping over footpaths that are cracked and uneven. Ask the residents in Garran, who have been talking about parking and traffic pressures for years, and all they get is shuffling of parking times. Those problems are not new. They were being publicly documented back in 2021.

Dr Paterson interjecting—

MR COCKS: All it seems that they get, despite the interjections from one of the government ministers, is short-term shuffling of time limits and dangerous conditions caused by on-road parking. Ask the residents in Curtin, who see parking pressure all around the shops and the local streets. Ask the families in Wright, who are dealing with rapid growth, crime, traffic, parking and infrastructure that has struggled to keep pace. Ask the residents around Isaacs and O'Malley about the dangerous intersections along Hindmarsh Drive and Yamba Drive—issues that I have been raising since I came into this place.

Ask the people in the inner south why basic footpath links are still missing. Speak to people who can no longer access their library on the weekend. Speak to people spending extra time in their cars because Labor has failed to deliver the parking they need and maybe speak to the people with a disability who cannot get where they need to go because the path just disappears. Speak with the sporting teams who have players injured due to outdated diesel line markings or injured because their fields have contaminated recycled soil that has been used on them. Or, if you prefer, use your own eyes. Look at the decaying road signs as you drive across the territory and ask yourself, "What message does this send to people visiting our city?" Look at the footpaths in Deakin and the shops in Mawson. Look at the declining access to our amazing local environment.

Canberrans should be able to take pride in our city. Canberra was intended to be a city the nation could take pride in. Yet, despite the government's record revenue take, despite the record tax burden on Canberrans, Canberrans are looking around and they are saying that we are losing the things that make Canberra special. With all the signs of neglect across our city, our services and our local infrastructure, Canberrans are right to ask—as many have: "Can we really afford to continue on the same path?" While Canberrans ask themselves why Labor has abandoned them, perhaps it is about time the government should ask themselves why so many Canberrans are abandoning Labor.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (11.42): I welcome the opportunity to discuss the budget measures under the City and Environment Directorate which touch on so many different parts of our lives. The areas of climate, transport and municipal services are of particular interest to the Greens and to myself. We want to know how we can invest in making Canberra a clean, green, liveable city—where you can walk to your local shops, enjoy

green spaces close to where you live, where you can take a deep breath of clean air—and how we prepare Canberra for the climate future to come while improving quality of life right now. This is a budget raises more questions than answers in achieving these goals.

Firstly, I will refer to climate. A changing climate remains one of the defining challenges facing our community. After a year in which the ACT has flatlined on emissions, this budget needed to show greater ambition. Canberra residents expect leadership on climate, and the Greens will continue to bring that expectation into this place. The need for action is clear from what we have heard across the community. Renters are struggling with soaring energy bills. Parents are worried about extreme heat affecting children's learning conditions. Young people are increasingly anxious about the consequences of decisions being made today. Seniors worry about whether they can heat or cool their homes in the face of extreme weather. Those concerns have only intensified as we have faced the prospect of a fuel crisis driven by our dependence on fossil fuels.

There are measures in this budget that deserve recognition. Some of these are Greens ideas, some of them continue the legacy of a Greens climate change minister and some reflect the community pressure for leadership on climate. This budget contains expansion to the Sustainable Household Scheme, bringing electric cargo bikes into the scope of low-interest loans. These are big, heavy-duty bikes that can do things like carry the shopping home and can genuinely replace a car. It is a climate-friendly option. I believe it will help make a difference—and it starts this month. I am very happy with this inclusion, which was prompted by a motion I moved back in May. I also thank Minister Stephen-Smith for her cooperation in making this change happen. Changes to motor vehicle duty rates will provide some encouragement for consumers to choose a lower and zero emissions vehicles. The extensions of rebates through the Home Energy Support Program and the continuation of the Renters Home Energy Advice Program will help households reduce energy costs while lowering emissions. Additional funding for heating and cooling in schools is also welcome, supporting climate adaptation and ensuring students can learn in safe and comfortable environments.

However, these measures do not go far enough to meet the scale of the challenge—or, to phrase it another way, our risk management plans are inadequate. Expert advice and recent experience demonstrate the challenges we are facing, and yet climate is treated as something to play limited lip-service to. The government must get serious about moving Canberra off gas and manage this process effectively to avoid leaving the territory with stranded gas assets after 2045. We need a stronger plan to decarbonise transport so as to achieve our legislated emissions targets, while also addressing the cost-of-living pressures associated with fossil fuel dependence. Climate adaptation also requires greater urgency and investment if we are to protect our community from extreme weather and climate-driven disasters.

There are doubts the government will be able to meet the ambition put forward in its plan. We need commitment to action and the funding to match. The Greens will continue to push for the investment and action required. We will keep fighting for stronger climate outcomes, and we will keep advocating for the concerns and aspirations of the Canberra community.

Coming to transport, personally, when it comes to public transport, a lot of what I was keen to contribute has already been said when we discussed Infrastructure Canberra. So, if you are reading this in *Hansard* and looking for historic commentary on buses and light rail, you will probably want to jump back a bit. I will go to active travel now: walkable paths, bikes and a broader road safety framework that supports it. Where this budget is more limited is in how it continues to place such heavy emphasis on a car-centric city, which we need to be moving away from. Projects like the Garden City Cycleway continue to be developed piecemeal and, in many stages, progressively terminating before reaching a destination. Active travel investment continues to be a tiny fraction of the roads budget and done in a way that reacts to problems rather than engaging on preventative maintenance to make our paths worthy of this city. This is fundamentally what the Greens would do differently.

The Greens would also, consistent with the extensive body of work being produced by Austroads on safe systems and Vision Zero, fully adopt the advice into the road design standards: 30 kilometre per hour backstreets; upgrades to pedestrian systems; separation of cycleways. There is a lot to be done, and trials on single streets is not going to help with adopting this well-researched advice in a timely fashion. What Canberra needs is meaningful political leadership with the courage to enact the best scientific advice that will get us to zero fatalities in our road system.

Coming to municipal services: municipal services shape how we experience our city every day, and the ACT Greens are passionate about ensuring that our city is clean, green, accessible and welcoming for all Canberrans. As our city grows and our climate changes, we should be asking a simple question: how do we invest in municipal services that make Canberra more liveable, resilient and connected? The Greens will continue calling on the government to accelerate efforts to increase Canberra's urban canopy. In a city increasingly exposed to heatwaves and extreme weather, trees are essential infrastructure and crucial to climate mitigation. Yet canopy coverage has declined in recent years and we remain off track to meet long-term targets.

This challenge is particularly pronounced in newer outer suburbs, where there are often have fewer mature trees, less permeable surfaces and more artificial grass, creating hotter suburbs—hotter suburbs that tend to on average have more vulnerable populations, creating greater heat risk. In what has been the hottest year on record for the planet, we must watch the massive health impacts that Europe has experienced during extreme heat events with alarm. Trees are not just nice to have; they are essential for the health of our population. In a similar vein, we must better recognise the vital role that shrubs and understory vegetation play in supporting healthy ecosystems, cooling our neighbourhoods and enhancing biodiversity. Additionally, if we want Canberra to be a more connected, accessible, inclusive city we must also invest in better footpaths. Safe, high quality and well-maintained paths enable children, older Canberrans and people with a disability to travel independently and participate fully in community life. Yet too many neighbourhoods, particularly in the outer suburbs, continue to miss out on the walkable infrastructure they need and deserve.

In closing, this budget contains important investments, but it does not yet match the scale of the climate, transport and liveability challenges facing Canberra. The Greens will continue to push for a city that is sustainable, connected and fair for everyone.

MR PARTON (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (11.49): I am speaking specifically to transport in this line, and I understand, as per the comments from Mr Braddock, that a lot of this bigger picture stuff was covered in Infrastructure—though I would say that, if you are reading this in the *Hansard*, you are probably a nerd. When it comes to transport, I think Canberra has the potential to have one of the best public transport networks in Australia. Indeed, when you go back through the historic patronage data, on the basis of that information from decades long past, apparently at one stage, we did. This budget contained nothing new for transport. In fact, if you look at the 2026-27 “Priorities for transport—Canberra operations”, there is a lot of “build on” and “continue to” but no firm commitments and certainly no progress towards their election commitments of faster and more frequent services.

Between the budget being presented and now, we have a new transport minister, and I certainly look forward to seeing how Ms Cheyne goes in this space. I do not know whether I am sad to see Mr Steel go from the space or not. But, under his watch, Transport Canberra has been brought to its knees with timetables slashed, some of the most significant reduction in services since self-government, as we have seen demonstrated quite clearly in recent weeks, and a government that is in chaos and under siege. The Greens have been quite clear about their lack of faith in both Mr Steel and Ms Cheyne, despite our ideological differences on exactly why.

Since the budget, Minister Steel was censured over his performance regarding the MyWay+ fiasco, and this budget makes no mention of seeking to recuperate costs from NEC Australia for the catastrophic rollout of the project. In fact, reading the budget, you would think that nothing has ever been wrong with MyWay+ and the government is just continuing to enhance and optimise. When Minister Steel first took charge of the transport portfolio in 2019, Transport Canberra had 452 buses on the road in route service and yet today there are just 450. All the while, the population of Canberra has increased significantly. This reduction in fleet size is emblematic of the disdain in which those not along the light rail corridor are held by the government. This mismanaged fleet procurement has been a common theme throughout Mr Steel’s tenure as transport minister. He is, after all, the minister who kept the Renault diesels in service for years after their legal end of service life, who failed to adequately plan for the retirement of the CMG fleet and who now it seems failed to adequately plan to grow the size of the bus fleet in real terms.

I have been pretty upfront about what a Liberal government would offer the people of Canberra in this space. We are going to grow the size of the bus fleet in real terms. We are going to immediately provide cost-of-living relief by capping transport fares at 50c. We are going to legislate a minimum service guarantee for our bus network. We are going to actually treat the travelling public as our partners and engage with them on genuine and meaningful consultation on their transport network.

Fare evasion is a big problem across our network. Who in this place has not been on a bus or a tram and seen someone get on without paying. The government know this and that is why they are spending a not insignificant amount of money telling people to pay their fare. So you would think that the government would then also have engaged in compliance operations to ensure that people have paid their fare and issuing expirations to those who have not. They have kind of started off in that space, but my understanding is that they have not issued a single expiration since the “Be fair—pay your fair”

campaign commenced. Because of the failure to conduct proper fair enforcement and the failure of the MyWay+ system to accurately capture data, we have no idea where people are going and what time they are going there. We have no idea how much revenue the territory is foregoing and how many people simply do not pay because they know nothing will happen. When I first came to this place the transport portfolio was held by Meegan Fitzharris. Then we had Mr Steel and now we have Ms Cheyne. Both Ms Fitzharris and Mr Steel made lofty promises during their tenure and failed to achieve anywhere near what they promised. The challenge is now before Ms Cheyne.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (11.54): I would like to speak to a range of issues in this portfolio, many of which were canvassed during the estimates hearings. First of all, one of the matters discussed during the estimates hearings was the new fee structure for the closure of footpaths across the ACT around construction sites. That is particularly my area of interest. We did a bit of a costing in my office on one of the closures on Mort Street in Braddon. A footpath has been closed off and a bit of parking has also been lost because of the development on that site.

If that were occurring in the city of Brisbane, it would cost over \$5,000 per week to close a footpath. To be fair, they have a minimum five-week charge, so there is a really strong disincentive in Brisbane to close a footpath like that, noting the impact on the accessibility of the city for people when footpaths are closed. In North Sydney, it would cost \$1,729, and in the city of Adelaide it would cost \$1,165. Here in Canberra, with the new fee structure, there would just be a \$420 fee for closing 60 metres or so of footpath like that stretch on Mort Street. This fee came into effect on 1 July and members may recall that it was debated last year. The government had introduced them and agreed to delay them by 12 months to consult further following advocacy from the Property Council.

In the meantime, the government have consulted further, but questions asked during estimates indicated that they have only consulted with industry, not with pedestrians, cyclists, or disability or road safety advocacy groups. That fee, which was originally set to be up to \$200 per block of closed footpath or bike path per day, was then reduced on the back of that consultation with industry to as little as 50c per metre per day. I acknowledge the different units of measurement, from per block to per metre. Perhaps that change is not a problem, but you are talking about a 400-metre block to match the old fees or a 200-metre block to match the old fees, which is a pretty significant block size.

This is a reduction in the cost. It will now cost us 50c to a dollar per metre to close a path per day, which is clearly not enough to incentivise developers to keep paths open around their construction sites. I anticipate this will not lead to any real increase in amenity for pedestrians, cyclists, people in wheelchairs, people using walking frames or people with visual impairment, who really rely on the city being walkable, with paths that they are used to using being open, even when construction is occurring. This is an issue that matters to Canberrans.

I acknowledge the cost of construction. The fees that have been set this year—I understand it is a year of kind of testing the water—are very unlikely to lead to fewer path closures and will instead become a cost. They will become an input cost and builders and developers will say, “We’ll add that cost to the list. Don’t worry about the

closures. It's not worth the effort." But, at some point, there are fees that would be prohibitive, and this is what other cities have explored. I would strongly encourage the government to explore that here so that we can set the fees or some other policy mechanism to make it so that developers say, "If I'm building on a site, I need to maintain footpath access or a safe pedestrian way around the site. We're not going to send people across the road," with potentially six lanes of traffic, as has happened on Northbourne Avenue, "We're going to make this city walkable".

That has to be a priority and it needs to be reflected in government policy. So I was pleased with the estimates committee's recommendation that the government review the effectiveness of its community path closure fees after 12 months, and, if a significant reduction in prolonged closure of paths has not occurred—which is what I anticipate—increase fees or undertake associated reform to appropriately drive that behavioural change. I welcome the government response on this. They have agreed to the recommendation to undertake a data-led review of the effectiveness of the community path closure fees.

I note that members have been asked to identify revenue-raising measures. This is something that members across the Assembly have focused on. That said, if it achieves its aim, which in estimates the government last year said was to disincentivise prolonged footpath closures, it probably will not raise much revenue because people will just stop closing the footpaths. This is something we should do. Adelaide, Bowral and the city of New York seem to have figured out how to keep paths open, so we in Canberra can too. I note this is happening in some locations, like in the city bus interchange right now. I understand class B hoardings have been used to keep the path open.

On the importance of active travel infrastructure, I have been calling for separated bike lanes on Northbourne Avenue, and I am not alone in that. This has been under consideration since 2018. This is something that we should be exploring through temporary trials. For instance, during COVID—and I have touched on this in this place previously—Berlin set up temporary bike lanes with bollards. They did this in 10 days or less, and that is something we could be doing on Northbourne Avenue as a test case, to see how many people who consider it unsafe to ride on Northbourne Avenue. It is a choice I make—I ride on that road—but I know a lot of people feel unsafe doing so. I suppose my measure would be that, if you do not feel safe taking your kids along on the bike ride with you, it is probably not a safe bike path. How many of those people would use the path if there were a separated lane?

I note that, because of a Geocon site that is being developed on the corner of Northbourne Avenue and Wakefield Avenue, there is a little section of separated bike lane and temporary loss of one of the car lanes. This is something we could run down Northbourne Avenue, and I would really implore the government to do this in future budgets, or any time really. It would not be to try this out as a temporary pop-up lane—an incredibly expensive exercise. I also note that there are other multiple lane closures on Northbourne Avenue right now. The short story is that motorists are getting used to having lanes closed on Northbourne Avenue, but there has not been a benefit for it. Of course, the ongoing construction will lead to some benefit in the future, but I think this is a great opportunity for mode shift and something that we should be pursuing, because Canberrans are active and we want to see our city become an easier place to get around

in without a car.

Another matter that I raised during estimates hearings was around playground infrastructure. I hope the government will follow through on this. The minister made a commitment to consider the issues that I raised, which I was pleased about. It touched on the Municipal Infrastructure Standards which require that shade cover be provided for play space users wherever possible, but those standards indicate that shade sails and other freestanding shade structures “shall only be considered in central community and district play spaces”, which excludes local neighbourhood play spaces. This has helped my understanding. Maliyan Park, a more than \$3 million playground, has no built shade structures, toilets or barbecues because it has been classified as a local neighbourhood play space. This is the lowest classification—the smallest play space—and the park cost over \$3 million. There are some technicalities around it. People are visiting that play space because it is an amazing playground, but they are finding that there is no shade and there are no toilets or other appropriate amenities, because of how it has been classified.

Meanwhile, central community play spaces include ones like the more than \$4 million Inner North Playground, which is another fantastic play space. Presumably, built shade had to be considered for that one but was decided against—there is a problem there—but it also captures playgrounds like the Dutton Street playground in Dickson, which is literally a ladder, a slide and two swings. This has been classified as a central community play space, as if it is going to attract people from across the suburb and neighbouring suburbs, which is not the case for that playground. I would encourage the government to review these infrastructure standards and also review the classifications of playgrounds across the territory.

In my electorate of Kurrajong, the only district play space we have, the Telopea Park playground, has been classified as such and was supposed to be built for large crowds and so on, with shade, toilets, barbecues, picnic tables and built shade structures. These are requirements of that kind of play space. To be honest, it is an all right playground, but it is not one that people are travelling to from across the electorate. They are travelling to some of the other playgrounds, which have been classified at a lower level and therefore do not have the amenity that parents, carers and children expect when visiting those playgrounds. This is something that needs to be looked at. With all of that said, I want to acknowledge that these new playgrounds are amazing. I welcome the government’s investment and hope that will continue to be the case across my electorate of Kurrajong and across the territory more broadly.

Something else that is missing from this budget is an increase in funding for more park rangers. The government committed to 10 additional infill park rangers in my supply and confidence agreement with the Chief Minister. This is something I am really keen to see delivered. This commitment would equate to a 33 per cent increase in rangers on 2024 levels. This is the bush capital. Canberrans highly value the natural environment around and blended into our city and our neighbourhoods. The ACT, as we know, is home to a number of threatened species and important ecological communities. Our ranger program is the front line for conservation work in the ACT and it needs to be appropriately funded to protect the environmental values Canberrans hold dear, as well as our ecological communities and incredible biodiversity.

The government's new draft Nature Conservation Strategy is a solid document. It is ambitious and there is a lot of good policy in it, but we actually need boots on the ground to implement it. This is a common issue across the government: having some great policies that are not implemented because the implementation is not sufficiently resourced. (*Extension of time granted.*) Conservation work, as we know, happens on long-term timeframes, and it needs to. The longer the recruitment of these additional rangers is delayed the worse the environmental outcomes will be for our parks and threatened species. This is not what our community expects. I understand the directorate is going through a round of redundancies. I hope that will free up resources to deliver on the front line, and, if not, that this will be considered in the budget review. I look forward to further conversations with relevant ministers on this moving forward.

On climate change strategies, as other members have discussed, in July 2026 the ACT government released its new Climate Change Strategy and action plan. Overall, there are relatively few tangible actions to actually reduce emissions and adapt to climate change. In this policy, there is a lot of focus on planning, exploring and investigating measures. We need tangible action on climate now. There is not enough detail in the strategy of what is going to be delivered, who will deliver it and by when. I am certainly concerned—and I am not alone in this—that this policy package will be insufficient to meet the government's emissions reduction targets.

This budget commits just over \$10 million over four years to deliver the strategy. This does not meet the scale of the issue or community expectations of climate action in the ACT. That is what I have heard from advocacy groups and local experts. The estimates committee also noted that the ACT government did not provide a detailed breakdown of how this funding will actually be spent. The ACT government's response to this was that they will provide further detail for an appropriate mechanism, with no timeline or detail on how this would be done, the format or by when.

One thing I did learn through a question on notice is that funding associated with the Climate Change Strategy and first action plan initiative supports eight existing ongoing full-time-equivalent positions within the ACTPS. So the \$10 million is funding eight existing roles. These are not new measures and these are not new positions; these are existing ongoing full-time-equivalent positions. These positions are performing a range of work across emissions reductions, adaptation, resilience, energy and nature conservation. The functions of these roles include developing policy advice, planning for policy and programs, and implementing programs. These roles are important. We need people doing the policy work, doing the planning work and driving the implementation work within government. These are existing roles. These are not new measures that will actually deliver on the ground.

We have just endured Canberra's hottest winter on record. We are in what will likely be the largest El Nino on record. This will present significant climate and extreme weather events and unnatural disaster challenges across Australia over summer and through to next year. Given the context of this strategy—which has a lot of words but not many tangible actions—and the funding allocated to deliver it, and given how much is going to staffing existing roles, it does not cut it.

In March this year, I provided a detailed submission to the government's consultation process for the Climate Change Strategy based on input from experts, environmental

and climate organisations and local advocates. This contained over 30 community-led policy measures aimed at actually reducing emissions and adapting to our changing climate, including things like spending less on road duplications and more on well-connected quality footpaths and cycling infrastructure, and the separated bike lanes down Northbourne Avenue that I mentioned. It included addressing barriers to electrification for apartments and taking advantage of new technologies like plug-in solar on balconies—not just providing advice to people about how to electrify but actually addressing the barriers we are seeing on the ground. It included expanding the Sustainable Household Scheme to provide low-interest loans for e-bikes, not just cargo bikes—I welcome the cargo bikes, but this should and could have been broader—upgrading school infrastructure, and standards to adapt to extreme heat.

Out of the 35 measures in my submission, the Climate Change Strategy and action plan show the government are implementing seven, and partially implementing six, while 22 have not been included in their strategy and plan at all. We need to continue leading in this area. Of course, there will be people listening to this in this building saying, “Who cares what Canberra does on climate? The issue’s too big for us.” But we have an opportunity to model what a sustainable climate-sensitive city looks like, and that is what the world needs: to show that this is doable, that it can be done. We really need to not underestimate the importance of what the ACT does in this area. I will continue pushing in this area moving forward.

Finally, I also want to touch on strata issues. The government committed to establish a strata commissioner in my supply and confidence agreement. Unfortunately, the budget does not contain funding to establish this position. This was, of course, a key recommendation of the legal affairs committee’s inquiry into the management of strata properties. I understand the timing of that inquiry and the government response to it may have made funding this role in this particular budget difficult, but I think this needs to be a priority, so I want to put on the record that this is something that not just I am interested in. I am constantly hearing from people in our community—at events and at mobile offices—that they are in the middle of a strata dispute and it is a complete nightmare, and they do not have someone in their corner when they are locked in a dispute like that to help them resolve it. We need this role to go some way to addressing that issue.

This new position will require sufficient funding to fulfil its functions and meet the level of need we are seeing across our community for assistance with strata issues. A dispute resolution function is absolutely critical to this. People should not have to go to ACAT and spend inordinate sums of money on lawyers against each other to find resolutions. I want to put on the record that it is critical for this strata commissioner role to include that dispute resolution function so that people have someone that they can go to to address these issues.

We are becoming a more compact and denser city. There are policy measures in place that the government has introduced to incentivise increased strata living, such as the missing middle lease variation charge discount. We are pushing people into more apartment and townhouse living, and that is something I welcome. It is something that makes sense. It is time for our city to do this, and this Assembly apparently supports that, because no-one opposed the missing middle reforms. As we do that, we need to make sure that strata living actually works for residents. It is the same with the stamp

duty concessions. Some are specifically targeted to people living under strata arrangements.

At the moment, there is a lack of confidence, to an extent, in living under strata. There is a lack of confidence in building quality, which I am sure is contributing to some of the empty apartments that we are seeing across the city. There is a clear role for government to address that so that government policy that is pushing for a denser city and pushing for more people to live closer together—in apartments, townhouses, terraces, duplexes and so on—is not accompanied by other government policies that push in the opposite direction. The strata commissioner role needs to be a priority, either pulled out of the resourcing made available through the redundancies that are underway or funded in the budget review. This is something I am repeatedly hearing from people as an absolute top priority for them. If you are locked in a strata dispute, it can completely derail your life and it would be the one thing that you say the government needs to do for you. There are increasing numbers of Canberrans, based on the anecdotal data I have been able to gather, in that category. Similar to what I mentioned regarding park rangers, I also look forward to having further conversations regarding this with the relevant minister. I hope to see that role funded soon because it is an urgent priority for our community.

MRS MORRIS (Brindabella) (12.12): Many Canberrans looking at this budget will be asking themselves: why the heck do I even bother? Why am I working so hard, trying to do the right thing to take care of my family and give them a comfortable, secure life when this government throws up roadblocks at just about every opportunity? The cost of living continues to spiral out of control. Household budgets continue to be smashed by Labor's rates, taxes, fees and charges. Businesses are buckling under the heavy-handed pressure of their unwelcome business partner, the Labor Party.

This is a budget that has been desperately stitched together by a Treasurer in turmoil and by a Chief Minister who is barely holding his government together. Three Labor ministers have been censured, including the Treasurer for his bungled roll-out of the \$64 million MyWay+ transport ticketing system. He could not even get a \$64 million MyWay rollout program out, so how can we trust him to administer the public's finances in the right way? We have a long-standing senior Labor minister of the Assembly missing, absent from this place over a major corruption scandal involving the former Deputy Chief Minister's office and her directorate, and we have the ACT Greens who, like so many Canberrans, have abandoned the Labor Party and refused to give them supply and confidence.

The Canberra Liberals have long opposed many of the policies of this government, and that will come as no surprise to many members of the community, but the ACT Greens, on the other hand, have stood shoulder to shoulder with the Labor Party for the better part of two decades. They have sat around the table with Labor, they have seen behind closed doors, and they have peeked under the blankets. They know what this Labor government looks like from the inside out, and now even the ACT Greens, in good conscience, cannot support this government.

The Labor Party now want us to forget all of that and trust them to deliver for Canberra. They want Canberrans to forget the corruption, forget the waste, forget the debt, and forget the interest bill—"Don't worry about the tax burden." They want Canberrans to

forget that they unlawfully issued \$600 fines for Canberrans and then quickly rushed through laws to give them retrospective legal protection for doing so. They want Canberrans to forget, but Canberrans are not buying it because, increasingly, day by day, Canberrans are coming face to face with the escalating costs, the decline of the city and the loss of the things that make Canberra special.

There is something else that this budget does which I want to focus on. This budget signals the death of aspiration and the hope of owning your own home with a garden where the kids can kick around and play. The Canberra Liberals believe helping Canberrans realise their dream of owning their own home is a social, economic and moral imperative. A home of your own gives a family stability, a place to put down roots and greater security for the future. Planning decisions determine whether that opportunity is within reach or whether another generation of Canberrans is left believing it will never be possible for them.

Sadly, the Labor government have spent years making promises about housing affordability while presiding over a planning system that makes it very difficult to actually deliver homes. The government control land release, planning rules and the taxes and charges imposed on development. These are very powerful tools, and those opposite need to take responsibility for how they use them. Every single dollar that this government add to the cost of housing comes from someone else's pocket. Labor is strangling land supply, inflating the cost of land and getting the housing mix wrong. Families who want to buy a home with a garden—maybe so that the kids can play cricket in the back yard—should not have to move over the border to realise that dream. They should be able to raise their children closer to home, closer to their work, and in the community that they want to call home, but this Labor government are effectively telling Canberrans that, if they want to own their own home with a bit of space and a garden, Canberra is not the place for them. This government's budget tells them that, if that is the hope and the dream that they aspire to, they will have to jump over the border.

Only 182 single dwelling blocks have been scheduled for release in 2026-27. Wrap your mind around that. From almost 4,300 residential dwellings, only 182 have been reserved for standalone housing. How is that choice? Tell me how that is choice. It is not choice. It is one thing to schedule land for release; it is another to actually release the land. Again, when you look at Labor's record, there is nothing to boast about. Of the 336 blocks for standalone housing programmed for release last financial year, only 184 were actually released. Canberrans should have a real choice of standalone housing, as well as other options such as apartments and townhouses. They should have the choice of homes that suit their needs for their stage of life, but this government is clearly denying them that choice and it has the balance wrong.

While releasing the right mix of land is critically important, the housing target alone does not build a home or give a young family somewhere to live. What matters is whether land can be developed, whether approvals can be obtained within a reasonable time, and whether construction can proceed. Every unnecessary delay has a cost. Someone pays the interest while an application sits unresolved. Someone pays when a project has to be redesigned to navigate confusing requirements. Ultimately, those costs make it harder for Canberrans to afford a home, because the person who has to pay is always someone else. It is not the Labor government; it is always someone else. Those costs always come out of someone else's pocket, which this government does not seem

to care about.

The Canberra Liberals support responsible urban renewal and housing choice. We support opportunities for more homes in established suburbs alongside sensible releases of land for new communities. Families should have real choice of standalone housing, where they can have a garden and space to raise a family, or apartments and townhouses. Earlier this year, the Assembly supported my call for clearer reporting on progress towards the government's promise of delivering 30,000 homes by 2030. With every quarter, it seems this target is further and further out of reach. But we will be watching. Canberrans deserve the opportunity to own a home, raise their family, and build a secure future in the community they love, in Canberra. Helping Canberrans realise that aspiration is a responsibility that the government must take seriously and it is one that the Canberra Liberals always will.

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) (12.21): The 2026-27 budget is a responsible budget in response to community needs with strategic investments. With respect to the ACT's new Climate Change Strategy, the budget invests more than \$10 million to deliver the first action plan. This ensures continued practical action against one of the defining challenges of our time. It is a responsible and measured investment that responds to emerging climate challenges, strengthens resilience across our community and economy, and lays the foundation for new and sustained actions over the decade ahead.

The new Climate Change Strategy was released in June 2026 and outlines Labor's vision for Canberra to be a climate-resilient, net-zero-emissions city by 2045, with a long-term ambition to become climate-positive. This means that our nation-leading commitment of net zero will no longer be our end point. Rather, as we continue to build climate resilience beyond 2045 and move towards climate repair, net zero will be one stop on the path to a climate-positive Canberra.

I note that there have been many comments on the Climate Change Strategy, and I will briefly address some of them. First is the comment about more action being required as well as more ambition—I believe the term is more “definite actions”, where it can be said, “This is exactly what we’re doing.” I would like to acknowledge that, in moving to this Climate Change Strategy, while we have a framework over a 10-year period, the action plan is intended to have short-term responsive actions that provide a level of agility we have not previously had to what is a very complex and wide-ranging challenge.

The funding we have is for those actions over the coming years, and, as I and the government have stated, we will continue to work on further actions through new action plans in the future. In comments presented by members in the chamber, I think there is an inherent assumption that this is the sole funding that will be going towards climate change. I do not think that is an accurate or fair representation. It also does not acknowledge the work that is going on across government for our climate change initiatives and the huge volume of not just work but also funding that goes with those. I would encourage members to look at not just one portion of the response but also the full response.

I would also like to draw members' attention to the fact that we are paving the way on how to get to net zero. There is no roadmap or precedent that we can necessarily follow that will provide a certain level of ambiguity as we work through these complex, wicked problems. To have the expectation that we could say, "This is the answer to everything"—while I would love to be in that position—would be unrealistic for anybody to sign up to.

There were also a few comments around the current funding going to ongoing staffing. That is not entirely reflecting the whole area. We certainly had previous initiatives under past climate change strategies. They were ceasing, and we have funded some work or increased some work that would count as a continuance of that, but it is new funding towards those initiatives, because the alternative is they cease to exist.

Looking at the strategy, it includes a different approach to previous strategies. The overarching framework includes three goals: net zero emissions; restoring and supporting nature; and ensuring our city is prepared for the changing climate. This acknowledges that climate mitigation and adaptation, including protecting nature, must be pursued together. Effective mitigation will mean we play our part in reducing global emissions, while adaptation helps manage the impacts that are already underway to protect our community and the environment.

We are also committed to delivering all climate action according to two core principles: equity and resilience. We have done this to ensure that climate action is effective, coordinated and fair. The overarching framework also sets out a series of visions and priorities across eight pillars that will focus our climate action efforts over the next decade. The Climate Change Strategy's first action plan supports activities that deliver initial and tangible actions for Canberrans in key priority areas, including community resilience, sustainable transport, and climate-conscious urban planning.

The strategy assists those who are most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change by funding the development of local climate plans and additional support for community organisations, and community-led projects to help Canberrans prepare and adapt to climate risks in a fair and equitable way. Our investment in the new Climate Change Strategy delivers on the ACT government's climate commitments and supports a more climate-resilient Canberra.

Just as importantly, climate action also delivers real benefits for Canberrans today through lower household energy costs, healthier and more liveable communities, greater resilience to climate impacts, and new opportunities for local innovation and investment. These are all practical actions that this budget backs for a more sustainable, resilient and thriving future for all Canberrans.

This budget puts people first, with cost-of-living pressure relief for priority households to ensure they are not left behind in the transition to a more sustainable future. We have invested \$2.4 million over three years to continue support for low-income homeowners and renters with utilities bills, alongside ongoing upgrades to public housing properties, improved household comfort, and building resilience to a changing climate.

This focus is also reflected through the budget's strengthening of the Sustainable

Household Scheme, with a higher loan cap and the inclusion of e-cargo bikes starting this month, allowing Canberrans to access even more products, including electric vehicles, through this popular climate focused scheme. We have also continued investment in the Home Energy Support program, ensuring eligible households can continue to access rebates for energy-efficient products that can save families hundreds of dollars each year. Homeowners and renters will also have access to free, tailored advice to help them understand their options and reduce energy costs.

The budget also delivers on climate-responsive infrastructure and city services by planning for a more climate-resilient Canberra, with \$12 million over three years to improve water efficiency across the ACT. This funding will strengthen drought and climate change resilience while supporting Canberra's long-term water security. The Water Efficiency Program will provide showerhead and tap upgrades for households; support a range of water efficiency upgrades in schools, businesses and public facilities and more efficient irrigation of sports fields and parks; and investigate improvements to regulations for better water efficiency in Canberra.

This year we have also invested \$2.7 million over four years in the health of one of Canberra's most valued waterways, through the new Healthy Waterways plan for Lake Tuggeranong. For the record and in response to some of Miss Nuttall's comments, this is all new funding and not drawn from any previous initiatives. This 10-year plan sets a clear path to restoring the lake's health by reducing nutrient pollution, which is the key driver of harmful algal blooms. Backed by extensive research and community consultation, our initial investment expands street-sweeping in the district, supports better gardening practices, strengthens monitoring and research across the catchment, and will enable innovative trials of anti-algal technologies.

As I have mentioned, the budget also reaffirms this government's commitment to protecting and enhancing our environment, including through community partnership, responsible land management, and strong biosecurity preparedness. I note a lot of comments have been made on the procurements that have been underway for environmental groups. I will not be making any comment on the conduct of those procurements, especially as they are still underway in some instances. We are supporting community-led outcomes for Canberra's environment through an additional \$940,000 over three years. This investment recognises that lasting environmental outcomes cannot be achieved by government alone.

Across Canberra, volunteers and community organisations make an extraordinary contribution to protecting our natural environment, restoring habitats, caring for wildlife and connecting people with nature. Their dedication delivers significant benefits for both our environment and our community. The initiative will strengthen organisations that support environmental volunteers, expand opportunities for community-led projects, enhance support for wildlife care and rehabilitation, and provide practical assistance for volunteer groups addressing significant weed challenges. It will also deliver an environmental volunteers conference, creating opportunities to share knowledge, celebrate achievements and build capability. Alongside this new funding, the government will continue to support its flagship environmental programs, ensuring volunteers can continue their valuable work in protecting Canberra's natural environment and strengthening community connection to nature.

Responsible land management remains essential to achieving our long-term conservation goals. The draft Nature Conservation Strategy is being finalised and will establish ambitious nature-positive targets to help halt and reverse biodiversity decline through proactive conservation and collective stewardship. I note the comments regarding funding of the strategy, but funding will be considered across the full duration of the strategy and in line with the evidence base that some members today have so passionately advocated for.

To support this work, the ACT government is developing the Nature Conservation Network—a framework for identifying areas critical to the long-term persistence and recovery of biodiversity at scale. The network will help protect important habitats, threatened species, endangered ecological communities and ecological connectivity corridors. It will also provide a strong foundation for the forthcoming Landscape Plan and help integrate conservation into future land-use decisions. This work will be supported by our great ecologists in the Office of Nature Conservation, as well as the ACT Government Landscape Architect. While on the topic of the Landscape Plan and the ACT Government Landscape Architect, I would also like to take a moment to note that just last week the ACT government was awarded the President's Award at the Australian Institute of Landscape Architects ACT Chapter awards, with the citation stating:

In recognition of its groundbreaking appointment of Australia's first Government Landscape Architect, establishing an important precedent for the role and influence of landscape architecture within government across Australia.

The citation further notes:

This landmark decision demonstrates a commitment to the future of the Australian Capital Territory and recognises the contribution landscape architecture can make to public policy, planning and the quality of the places communities experience every day. By bringing landscape expertise into government, the ACT has created an opportunity for long-term, integrated and place-responsive thinking to inform decisions across the Territory. The appointment elevates the role of the profession and establishes a precedent for other Australian jurisdictions. The ACT Government's leadership, vision and willingness to take this decisive step will influence the Territory's landscapes and strengthen the place of landscape architecture within government for years to come.

With the fire season just around the corner for another cycle, this year's budget continues our strong investment in the ACT Parks and Conservation Service Bushfire Operations program. I note Mr Emerson's comments around the supply and confidence agreement commitment for more rangers, and that is certainly very much acknowledged and will be worked through across the remainder of the term. In the meantime, though, the investments we have made this budget ensure that this program undertakes critical fuel reduction, fire trail maintenance, workforce development and operational preparedness activities across more than 70 per cent of the ACT.

This continued investment will ensure we maintain the capability needed to reduce bushfire risk and protect communities, infrastructure, environmental values and cultural heritage. Importantly, this initiative also continues the Ngunnawal cultural advisor

program, creating opportunities for Ngunnawal-led Caring for Country projects and supporting greater community understanding of land management and cultural knowledge. Funding will also support ecological restoration across protected areas and the development of a new ACT environmental offsets policy to ensure development impacts on threatened species and ecological communities are appropriately addressed and deliver improved biodiversity outcomes.

Strong biosecurity management is another critical pillar of environmental protection. This budget strengthens the ACT's capacity to prevent, prepare for and respond to biosecurity threats, including invasive pests, plant diseases and zoonotic pathogens. Investment will support ongoing operational capability, strengthen governance arrangements and retain specialist expertise within the ACT Biosecurity team. This important funding arrives at a time when our Biosecurity team is focused on and continuing to expand the ACT's preparedness for the impacts of H5 bird flu.

Funding will also support collaboration with national and interstate partners to address emerging threats and meet obligations under national biosecurity response agreements. The development of a risk based biosecurity action plan will further strengthen the territory's ability to identify, prevent and manage biosecurity risks. Initiatives and investments like the ones I have outlined demonstrate this government's commitment to protecting the ACT's environment and building a more resilient and equitable future for all Canberrans through a balanced, proportionate and responsible budget.

Debate (on motion by **Ms Cheyne**) adjourned to a later hour.

Sitting suspended from 12.36 to 2.00 pm.

Questions without notice

Palliative Care—Community Options palliative care service

MR PARTON: My question is to the Deputy Chief Minister and former Minister for Health.

Minister, this morning on ABC Radio you said that funding for Community Options has not been cut and that funding is continuing. In my interview with Alice Matthews this morning, she stated that you had messaged her as the former health minister and that you had said that Community Options had made the decision to shut down. Do you stand by the characterisation that the Community Options group just made a decision one day to shut down their services and that this decision had no relationship with your government's decision to discontinue their funding in this space?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: It is absolutely my understanding that the funding for the Palliative Care Service is absolutely continuing.

Dr Paterson: If I could assist with the question. The Palliative—

Mr Cocks: Point of order: the question was about the minister's comments on radio, not about another minister's understanding, and the minister had commenced an answer.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I will continue to answer the question.

MR SPEAKER: Just on that, the minister had taken a stand and is answering. I do not think we can have two ministers answering. One minister does. The question has to be taken a bit before that, and it is directly relating to the minister's comments on radio. Minister.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Thank you, Mr Speaker. That was absolutely my understanding. If the Minister for Health takes a supplementary question, maybe that can be corrected.

I would certainly note that that was the understanding on the basis of a couple of meetings that I have had with Community Options where there had been some detailed discussions that did not in any way involve this program but that Community Options was struggling with viability because of changes to aged-care funding, because of NDIS funding challenges and because it had not been successful in a commissioning round for the CATS program as it transitioned from CASP to CATS. Those were—from my very clear understanding in my meetings with Community Options—the challenges that I had understood the organisation was facing. If I was incorrect about the funding for this particular Palliative Care Program, I apologise for that. Certainly, the last information I had as minister was that that funding had not been removed and that that was not in any way relevant to the challenges that Community Options was facing.

MR PARTON: Can you confirm whether the government has reduced, changed or otherwise altered the funding available for Community Options, either in the palliative care area or the Community Transition Support Program area?

Ms Stephen-Smith: This is a very different question, Mr Parton.

Mr Parton: No; it's not. It's not at all.

Mr Cocks: It's a supplementary.

MR SPEAKER: Members! You are taking this question as Minister for Health?

Dr Paterson: Mr Speaker, I would seek your determination regarding standing order 59, which says:

A Member may not anticipate the discussion of any subject which appears on the Notice Paper ...

This is the exact debate that we will be having to Mr Parton's motion after question time.

MR SPEAKER: Standing order 130, which relates to that, is removed when it applies to question time. We have had this debate before. We are going to address that in a standing orders review. It used to apply to questions. It no longer applies to questions, so you can anticipate debate in questions.

DR PATERSON: All right. I will answer the question. The funding for the Palliative

Care Program has not ceased; it is ongoing funding of \$140,000. Community Options wrote to the ACT government in July confirming that they will no longer seek a renewal of their contract and a continuation of funding.

MR CAIN: Minister, can you explain precisely what has changed that means Community Options can no longer deliver the service, if the funding has not been cut?

DR PATERSON: Precisely nothing has changed for the government. The government has ongoing funding to support the Palliative Care Program. What has changed is that the Community Options board's decided to close their service in the ACT. That is a decision independent of government. Government has ongoing funding for \$141,000 to deliver a palliative care program in the ACT, and that will continue.

Public schools—staffing

MS LEE: My question is to the Minister for Education.

Minister, the ACT Australian Education Union has said that “staffing shortages and split and collapsed classes have become chronic”. Yet last week in the media you revealed that your government does not even collect data on how many classes are being split or collapsed in ACT government schools.

Minister, how can you possibly manage staffing shortages, assess their impact on student learning or develop policies to address them when your directorate does not have even the most basic information?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Ms Lee for the question, because it is a really important one. This goes to the heart of the reform program that is underway for the “one public education system”. We have been operating a public education system in the ACT with a high level of school autonomy, with principals responsible for managing their schools, their staffing, the way that teacher absences are supported and managed and a whole range of other things that, frankly, should not be the responsibility of principals and business managers at schools. They would be much more efficiently managed in a centralised way. That was something that was very clear through our school system resourcing review. That is why we are now undertaking this reform program.

Part of that reform—and it has been clearly discussed with the union and with school leaders—is that, if the Education Directorate, the Education Support Office, is going to lean in and support schools in terms of relief staffing, casual staffing and how to manage teacher absences and reduce the incidents of split and collapsed classes, we need to have better information on that. That information has been held at the school level. The Education Directorate is now working through updates to the Student Administration System to ensure that that information can be gathered as a more centralised source of information in a way that does not put an extra burden on schools in terms of administration—so through the existing Student Administration System—and will then work with schools to support them to manage unexpected teacher absences.

So this is absolutely part of the reform program. I agree with Ms Lee that it is not ideal that we do not have that information. But it is a factor of the history of our autonomous

public schools.

MS LEE: Minister, just to be clear then: are you seriously asking parents, teachers and students to accept that a directorate with a budget of around \$1.5 billion and thousands of employees cannot tell Canberrans how many classes are being split or collapsed across the ACT school system?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I really refer Ms Lee to my first answer. The vast amount of that money goes to the 93 public schools—soon to be 94 public schools—and the preschools across the ACT. Up until now, they have operated very much on an autonomous basis, managing those situations within the school environment, and that information has not been collected centrally. We are moving to collect that information.

Ms Lee has been the shadow minister for education for some years. I have been the education minister for only a short period of time. If Ms Lee had been so concerned about this matter six months ago, maybe she could have asked about it then. She has asked about it after we have started fixing the problem.

MRS MORRIS: Minister, how can parents have any confidence that you understand the true extent of the teacher shortage crisis in ACT schools if your directorate does not even know how many classes are being split or collapsed?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank the Deputy Leader of the Opposition for her question. She has put a lot of tone of voice into that, but I refer her to my first answer.

Members interjecting—

Mr Cocks: Point of order, Mr Speaker, on personal reflections.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I withdraw, Mr Speaker.

Obviously, the Deputy Leader of the Opposition is passionate about this topic, but I would refer her to my first answer. This is an issue that I very well understand, having got out to the extent that I can and met with teachers, principals and school leaders. I want to thank all of those teachers, parents and students who have shared their information with me, including Lacey-Mae, who is in the audience today, who has written an open letter to me, which I have received and not yet responded to, talking about the impact of teacher shortages and collapsed and split classes.

I very much understand that this is a significant issue, and I would really like us to have more central information in relation to the data. In the meantime, the Education Directorate is working with schools to better understand the issue and to understand how that data can be collected centrally in a way that is going to provide the least administrative burden on schools, so that the Education Directorate and the Education Support Office can lean in and support schools.

But, in the meantime, I thank all of the teachers who are working so hard in such a challenging environment. I recognise that there has never been a more difficult time to be a teacher than it is now—with technology, with behaviour and complexity in students and families, and with these workforce pressures which exist across the country.

Urban growth boundary—establishment

MS CLAY: My question is to the minister for planning.

Minister, thank you for publishing the *Statement on progress in considering an urban growth boundary*, which was provided in response to my 2025 parliamentary calls to set city limits and protect the western edge. The update says that government in the first half of this year has been doing investigations of the western edge area. The report shows 37 investigations and studies have already been completed. What further studies does government need to complete before it can simply decide to protect the western edge?

MR STEEL: Ecological studies—including assessments of threatened flora and fauna, woodland birds, grassland species, hollow-bearing trees and broader ecological values—a cultural heritage assessment; and a detailed land attributes study, including a topographical survey, a tree survey and assessment.

I want to reiterate that no decisions have been made about the western edge, and the reason for that is we need to undertake those studies to gather the evidence to be able to make informed decisions and to consult with the community about further extending protections on the western edge. The current status of the western edge is that it is a non-urban area, and what that means is that it already has a level of protection under the Territory Plan from new suburbs being built in that area.

So, what we are talking about here is extending protections, particularly to areas of high conservation or environmental value. What that might mean is quite significant changes for rural landholders; we need to show the evidence that we are gathering through these studies, to be able to work with them and make decisions about further protections in that area.

I fully expect that there will be significant extra protections in the western edge as a result of the work that is underway and that we will be consulting on around the middle of next year, as part of an updated planning and transport strategy as well as a draft Territory Plan amendment, which we will put to the community for their views next year. We are looking forward to that. That will be informed by the rigorous evidence base that is being developed at the moment, and it will inform the setting of an urban growth boundary for the ACT, which we believe will cover significant parts, if not the full area, of the western edge.

MS CLAY: Minister, noting the report's commitment to consultation with traditional custodians and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, when will this consultation take place for land decisions about the western edge and city limits?

MR STEEL: It will take place in relation to the planning and transport strategy. I have already asked the City and Environment Directorate to brief me on how they want to undertake that consultation with First Nations peoples, and of course we will be consulting with the broader community as well. That will include any changes to the Territory Plan to enact the urban growth boundary for the ACT, which is not just focused on the western edge but other areas of Canberra as well.

MS VASSAROTTI: Which First Nations people and organisations will the ACT government consult with before key land decisions are made?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question. That is exactly the advice I have sought from the City and Environment Directorate.

Urban growth boundary—establishment

MR EMERSON: My question is also to the minister for planning.

The western edge investigation area covers almost 10,000 hectares of unique country west of Canberra, an ecological sanctuary home to beautiful rivers, critically endangered ecosystems and many threatened plants and animals. It is also a site of significant cultural importance to Ngunnawal people.

Last year's resolution requiring the ACT government to establish an urban growth boundary has led to a community campaign calling on the government to protect the Western Edge from development by keeping it outside this urban growth boundary. Almost 3,000 Canberrans have signed the "Save Our Western Edge!" petition, some of whom join us in the gallery today.

Noting our love for nature here in the bush capital, the extensive community interest in this issue and the government's own self-stated commitment to nature conservation in the ACT, is the government on track to release an amendment to the Territory Plan to establish an urban growth boundary by June 2027 as agreed in last April's Assembly resolution?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. Yes, we are on track to meet the resolution and we will be releasing both a draft planning and transport strategy in June next year, as well as a draft amendment to the Territory Plan, enabling the urban growth boundary.

But importantly, what we are also doing is that we are continuing the reforms that our government brought to the election as an alternative to urban sprawl, which is to support more housing within the existing urban footprint of Canberra through the missing middle housing reforms which have already gone through the assembly, but also through transit oriented development and shop adjacent development.

It is one thing to rule out future urban development on the fringes of Canberra, but we also need to make sure that we are enabling more housing for our growing population, and we want to see that happen in more areas within our existing urban footprint and we are doing that work at the moment.

I really appreciate the support of the campaigners for the western edge for those significant reforms to enable more housing close to rapid transport connections, close to shops, amenities, jobs and services, because we need to make sure that as our city grows, we are growing in a compact and sustainable way and creating more walkable neighbourhoods that allow us to continue to have the high quality of life that we have and protect our environment around Canberra as well—and within Canberra through

our network, the nature conservation network and the network of nature reserves.

So that work is happening at the moment. There will be multiple touch points for consultation as we bring forward further changes on transport oriented development. We already have been out there on the northern gateway changes. We have already been out there with the changes proposed in the Thoroughbred Park precinct as well. *(Time expired.)*

MR EMERSON: Minister, why hasn't the ACT government already committed to fully excluding the western edge from the urban growth boundary, given the community support for doing so and noting the Canberra Liberals, ACT Greens and many independents committed at the 2024 election to protect the western edge from development?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. As I noted in the answer to the previous question, this area is a non-urban zone, so new estates cannot be built in these areas as it stands. What we are talking about here is an extended level of protection to areas particularly of high conservation value, and that is a conversation that we need to have with the rural leaseholders in that area and we need to present them with the evidence showing that there are higher ecological values in parts of that area that might warrant extending protections to those areas—so a higher level of protection than what is currently there.

So we need to have that evidence base developed through the studies that are underway. But of course the studies are not just limited to the western edge. There are studies that have been occurring right across the ACT and the urban growth boundary will be looking at applying across a wider part of the ACT than just the western edge.

So the default is there is no development allowed. And what we are looking at is how we can extend protections to areas within the western edge as well as other parts of Canberra and we are doing that work to be able to then consult with the community to hear their views based on that evidence and what that level of protection looks like through the creation of an urban growth boundary. And I am looking forward to presenting that in line with the Assembly resolution at the middle of next year.

MS LEE: Minister, when will the community members who are passionate about this issue, like those who are present in the gallery today, be consulted on setting an urban growth boundary? What is the time frame?

MR STEEL: Well, I refer the member to the answers I have already provided.

Ms Lee interjecting—

MR STEEL: I have been very clear that we said June for the urban growth boundary with the draft changes to the Planning and Transport Strategy and a draft major plan amendment. And then of course, there is a statutory process that needs to be undertaken there and the Assembly committee may wish to inquire. That will be a decision that they will need to make in relation to the Territory Plan amendment.

I do not have direct control over that. They will need to consider those changes, but the

default is that no new suburbs can be built in these areas, so they already have a level of protection. What we are talking about here is potentially expanding that based on the studies that are underway and we will present through those studies being completed, the information that the community needs to have an informed decision, both those who are supporters of further protections in the western edge and the existing rural landholders in this area, who will no doubt also want to have a say as part of the consultation as well.

Public schools—staffing

MS LEE: My question is to the Minister for Education.

Minister, last week we heard from ACT Parents about the ongoing impact of industrial action on students and families. We heard of over-crowded classes, with some students being placed in classes of up to 50 students, students being moved into split classes due to teacher shortages and disruptions to learning.

We also heard from year 3 Macgregor Primary School student Lacey-Mae, who is joining us in the chamber today along with her mum and granddad:

The strikes are impacting students learning harshly as well as teachers' health. Students are over being disappointed when sports days and excursions are cancelled last minute due to strikes.

Minister, these issues of teacher shortages and split classes did not arise overnight. After more than two decades in government, do you take responsibility for the failures of your predecessors, and what do you say to students like Lacey-Mae, and so many others across the ACT government school system, for allowing teacher shortages and workforce pressures to worsen to the point that they are now disrupting learning across their schooling?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Ms Lee for the question, and again, thank Lacey-Mae and her family for joining us in the chamber today and for her advocacy. It certainly is a piece of persuasive writing that has got a lot of attention, so great to see our public education system supporting young people like Lacey-Mae to learn to argue a case in writing.

What I would say to all of the students across our public education system and to the teachers and to parents and carers, is that we absolutely understand the challenges that teachers and students are facing with workforce challenges at the moment. This is not an issue that is unique to the ACT. This is a national issue of teacher workforce shortage. It is one we have been talking about in this place for some years.

The Public School System Resourcing Review has pointed the way to some solutions in the ACT to ease that pressure. One of those solutions is undertaking more work centralised in the Education Directorate to improve the efficiency of things like supporting schools when there are unexpected teacher absences. Part of the response to that is going to be collecting more information so that more structured arrangements can be put in place. But there is also a range of other mechanisms in terms of workload that have already been implemented through Strong Foundations, including providing

standardised materials to teachers to reduce their workload in preparation for classes, and those activities will continue. We will continue to work with the union, with the teaching workforce and with school leaders to understand how we can reduce that workload, stop teachers getting as sick and ensure that every student has a teacher in front of them.

MS LEE: Minister, what are you doing to address the system failures right now—right now—including disrupted learning, cancelled activities and a lack of available teachers in classrooms—as you said yourself, a teacher is not in every classroom—instead of continuing to talk about long term reform and getting more data?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: In her earlier question, Mr Speaker, Ms Lee was criticising us for not having data and now she appears to be criticising us for wanting to get the data. I am not sure she can have it both ways.

These are not only long term reforms. I also indicated in my response to the earlier question that we are already undertaking action to reduce the workload on teachers. The Education Directorate is already working with schools and school leaders to support them to deliver increased improvement in recruitment and retention, support for teachers and bringing more teachers into the classroom. In 2026 the directorate is supporting the engagement of 18 Permit to Teach School Based Teacher Education Programme, or STEP fellows, and 38 Learning Support Assistants under the University of Canberra STEP Program. This is bringing more qualified teachers into the classroom more quickly. We are not going to solve this problem overnight, but we are taking urgent action to address these issues with our teachers, with our school leaders and in collaboration with parents and Parents ACT as well.

I would just note, Mr Speaker, that in her first question on this topic I think Ms Lee was blaming industrial action for split and collapse classes and I want to be really clear that industrial action is not the cause of split and collapse classes and that I strongly support the right of teachers to take industrial action as part of the negotiating process. We will continue to negotiate in good faith to reach a resolution to the enterprise agreement as quickly as possible to reduce those interruptions—

Ms Lee: Point of order. Mr Speaker, the minister has attempted to misrepresent my words and put her own spin on it and I ask her to actually review that and withdraw.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I am happy to review the *Hansard*, Mr Speaker. That was how I heard Ms Lee's question. If I was incorrect, I am happy to withdraw that, but I did need to clarify to ensure it is clear on the record.

MRS MORRIS: Minister, can you guarantee to parents that conditions in our schools will improve this year, or are you asking them to simply trust that future reforms will fix problems your government has allowed to develop over years?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank the Deputy Leader of the Opposition for her question. Well, we are certainly working hard with schools, but this is not a problem and a challenge that can be addressed overnight. There is a national teacher workforce shortage. There has been a taskforce. There has been a lot of work to ensure we could get more teachers into our schools. That work has been successful but there is clearly

more to do to ensure there is support for schools where there are unexpected teacher absences to ensure there can be a teacher in front of every class. That is certainly an objective I share with the teaching workforce and with the union, but I am not going to make commitments that I know are going to be very challenging to deliver because of a national teacher workforce shortage.

Visitors

MR SPEAKER: Members, in the gallery we have four staff members of the WA parliament who are visiting. They are part of the ANZACATT program, and they are having a look at how we do business. I am sure they will all go back and report favourably, if we all can continue to perform as well as we are at the moment—and behave during question time, particularly you, Mr Cocks! They are interested in standing order 118AA, so we will see how that plays out.

Welcome to the ACT. I hope you have a good time here.

Questions without notice

Health centres—North Gungahlin Health Centre

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Minister for Health.

Minister, Labor committed to new health centres for Gungahlin and Tuggeranong on the same day in 2020. Next month, the government will celebrate the opening of the South Tuggeranong Health Centre while the North Gungahlin Health Centre is still yet to be designed. Why did the government prioritise Tuggeranong over Gungahlin?

DR PATERSON: I will take that on notice.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, will my community get to celebrate the opening of the north Gungahlin health centre before the next election?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I will answer as the Minister for Health Infrastructure. I apologise; I should have taken the last question. I was trying really hard to avoid being triggered by a question to the Minister for Health.

There was earlier planning in relation to Tuggeranong. It was an easier site to build on than the Gungahlin site, which required some subdivision and further planning work. So it was easier to get on with the build in the Tuggeranong site. I am really pleased that we will deliver the new health centre in South Tuggeranong in just a couple of months. So it will open before the end of this year.

There is further planning work that is required for the north Gungahlin site because it is planned to be a shared site between an emergency services facility, a health facility and a sports facility across that site. That required some further work and consideration around the investment and the planning for that site.

Ms Castley: Just on a point of order: if it is going on notice, the supplementary was: will the community get to celebrate before this term is over? Will we expect it by then?

MR SPEAKER: You did talk to the issue, but you were not clear on when it will open and if it will be open before the next election. If you do have something to add, Minister?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I will not be pre-empting future budget decisions in relation to the North Gungahlin Health Centre, but I can assure Ms Castley that there is continued consideration in terms of infrastructure investment in every budget process, and we will be making announcements in the context of those budget processes as they proceed.

MR EMERSON: What about the Inner South Health Centre? Will that be delivered before or after the North Gungahlin Health Centre?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: The Inner South Health Centre will be delivered before the north Gungahlin health centre. Planning is very well underway. Obviously, there has been a major plan amendment that was approved. It has been supported as a territory priority project. Pre-development application consultation is underway, and I would encourage anyone who has an interest in the Inner South Health Centre to engage in that process through YourSay or directly through the pop-ups that have been occurring through in the inner south. I have been to a couple myself at Narrabundah shops and at Griffith shops, and there has been really good engagement from the community on what the design of that looks like. In fact, despite some of the public commentary, there has been really strong positive feedback about the about what the health centre will deliver for the inner south. I know that a lot of people had said they wanted a walk-in centre. It is going to be a health centre that is more targeted at people with chronic illness, community nursing, community allied health and, of course, a state of the art dental facility. That will be delivered, we expect, by mid-2028, if all goes to plan in terms of the development application and construction process.

Cemeteries and crematoria—Southern Memorial Park

MS CARRICK: My question is to the Minister for City and Government Services. Minister, the government has spent almost \$3.3 million on planning, investigations and design work for Southern Memorial Park since 2011-12—15 years—yet there is still no commitment to construction funding. At the same time, the Cemeteries and Crematoria Authority has stated it will continue to investigate options for future internment capacity at the Woden Cemetery. Southern Memorial Park is expected to provide around 100 years of capacity. Minister, why has the government still not committed construction funding or a delivery timetable for stage 1 of Southern Memorial Park after spending almost \$3.3 million over 15 years to plan it?

MS CHEYNE: Certainly I would refer Ms Carrick to what is on the public record. It is not that the government has not been doing any work towards this. There has been a development application process. Obviously, that has been a considerable amount of work. It remains subject to future funding. I appreciate that Ms Carrick made remarks earlier this morning about what is in the board's statement of intent for Canberra Memorial Parks. What is in that statement of intent is not new; it has actually been in there for several years. We know that Woden is rapidly reaching capacity, and it is a genuine risk that the board has identified as we look to make sure that there is a viable

option for the south side.

MS CARRICK: Minister, can you rule out expanding Woden Cemetery into Eddison Park?

MS CHEYNE: That is a hypothetical, Mr Speaker, and I think I am also being asked to make an announcement of government.

Mr Cocks: On a point of order: I do not believe that this was a hypothetical question. It was asking about the scope of existing announcements.

MR SPEAKER: I agree it is not hypothetical, but it is asking the minister to rule something out, in terms of a policy. If she is not prepared to take the question and considers that a matter of policy, I will accept that as a response. The minister does not have anything further to add.

MR EMERSON: Minister, when do you expect Southern Memorial Park to be ready to accept interments?

MS CHEYNE: I do not have a figure in front of me. It is obviously dependent on those preliminary works getting underway. One of the challenges with Southern Memorial Park is that it will have a significant amount of establishment work to undertake. That will mean that, once that has been completed, the acceptance of internments will be able to happen quite quickly, but site establishment and making sure that it is a place that is appropriate for the public and appropriate for its purpose are extremely important for us. To clarify, stage 1 of Southern Memorial Park received development application approval on 6 July this year, so we are now working through the next stages.

Drugs—suspected drug overdose deaths

MRS MORRIS: My question is to the Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services. On 5 September, ACT Policing reported seven deaths from suspected drug overdoses in the previous month and warned of potentially lethal drugs circulating in Canberra. On behalf of the opposition, I express our sincerest condolences to families and loved ones who were impacted by those deaths.

Minister, what has ACT Policing established about the substances involved and the sources supplying them?

DR PATERSON: This will be a matter determined by the Coroner. We have had numerous drug overdose deaths over the past few weeks. We have had an awareness-raising campaign by ACT Policing, ACT Ambulance Service, and Directions ACT, encouraging the community to get their drugs tested, if they do choose to take drugs, and raising awareness of Naloxone and the availability of that in the community, because we are seeing an issue with drugs that have very potent synthetic opioids in them. Some individuals may not be sure what they are taking, and obviously these drugs are very toxic.

MRS MORRIS: Minister, what, if any, resources have been allocated to police to help them identify and disrupting the supply of these lethal drugs in the community?

DR PATERSON: Police have allocated very significant resources to disrupting the distribution and sale of drugs in our community. We recently had the statement regarding the grow houses that police had uncovered. That was an operation that had been undertaken with the Western Australia Police, and 11 grow houses in the ACT were uncovered and individuals were charged. We also saw the arrest of seven OMCg members in the past couple of weeks, and a huge amount of drugs, cash and firearms were seized as well. So there are—

Mrs Morris: On a point of order, Mr Speaker, on relevance: my question goes specifically to the supply of these lethal drugs that are circulating in the community; whereas, the minister is speaking broadly about grow houses and—

MR SPEAKER: She still has a minute to go, Mrs Morris. So we will see if she does turn her attention to that. She has been relevant in turning to the response to drugs.

DR PATERSON: I do not know how Mrs Morris would know whether these drugs were responsible for those individuals deaths. It seems quite a ludicrous question in her point of order. What I was saying is that the police are investing significant resources in disrupting drug-trafficking activities in the ACT.

MR CAIN: Minister, following these deaths, have you received advice on whether your government's drug decriminalisation policy is attracting drugs to Canberra?

DR PATERSON: The national drugs survey looks at wastewater testing across the country, and what we have seen across every jurisdiction is a significant increase in the levels of drugs in the wastewater analysis. Other jurisdictions have not legislated change to drugs of dependence and yet we have seen a very consistent rise across the country. So we do not believe that it is a result of the legislative change.

Australia-European Union Free Trade Agreement—ACT impact

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: My question is to the Minister for Trade, Investment and the Knowledge Economy.

Minister, negotiations on the Australia-European Union trade agreement have concluded. Can you outline what this agreement means for the ACT and how Canberra businesses, workers and institutions stand to benefit?

MR BARR: I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for the question. The Australia-EU trade agreement is the most significant trade agreement for the ACT that I can recall. That is because we have the most knowledge-intensive economy in the country. Our strengths lie in research, higher education, professional services, cybersecurity, defence industries, digital technologies, space capability, health innovation and clean technology. These are the precise sectors that will benefit the most from stronger economic integration with Europe.

For Canberra businesses, the agreement will improve market access, reduce barriers to trade and investment, and provide greater operational certainty in one of the world's largest and most sophisticated economic regions. For our universities and research

institutions, it creates new opportunities to deepen existing EU partnerships, to expand collaborative research and to accelerate the commercialisation of innovation. For workers in the ACT, the benefits are jobs, more exports, more investment and more international collaboration support for the high value, highly skilled employment that underpins our economy.

Importantly, the agreement also contributes to economic diversification. At a time of increasing global uncertainty, strengthening our economic relationship with Europe significantly broadens the opportunities for businesses in the ACT.

The government has consistently advocated for greater international engagement, because Canberra succeeds when our businesses, our researchers and our innovators are connected to the world. So, we are strongly calling on the Australian parliament to support this agreement when it comes to a vote.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Minister, which ACT industries are best placed to take advantage of the new opportunities created by the agreement?

MR BARR: There are several sectors where the ACT is exceptionally well-positioned to benefit. Firstly, in our technology and cybersecurity industries, we are Australia's leading centre for cyber capability, and stronger links with European markets will support new contracts, partnerships and export opportunities. Secondly, our universities and research institutions have longstanding relationships throughout Europe. The agreement provides an opportunity to deepen those collaborations, to attract further investment and to turn research excellence into commercial outcomes. Thirdly, Canberra's growing space sector stands to benefit from stronger engagement with one of the world's most advanced space ecosystems. Partnerships in satellite technology, earth observation, communications and space research all present significant opportunities. We also see significant benefits for clean energy technologies, professional services, health innovation, advanced manufacturing and defence related industries.

More broadly, the agreement is well suited to the ACT, because modern trade is increasingly about trade in services, the exchange of ideas, expertise and innovation, rather than simply the movement of goods. Canberra's economy is built on knowledge, talent and ingenuity. This agreement helps connect those strengths to new markets, to new customers and to new sources of investment. All of this combines to support our economic growth and the creation of even more high-quality jobs for Canberrans.

MR EMERSON: Chief Minister, what is the government doing to address issues like payroll tax, high insurance costs and higher rents in the ACT relative to other jurisdictions, which might hinder some of the opportunities you have described in your remarks?

MR BARR: I do not believe they are a hinder to that. This trade agreement, which is the focus of the question, is the most substantive agreement that Australia can strike to diversify economic opportunity. We currently have trade agreements with 19 countries in a bilateral sense, and there are another 11 that are covered by multilateral. This is an agreement with 27 countries. It is the most substantive thing that the Australian government can do in partnership with the states and territories to support Australia's

future economic growth. We support it so strongly because it is all upside for the ACT. Our services economy stands to benefit more than any other state or territory from this. It is a really important and substantive issue that will come before the Australian parliament, and I am calling on every member of that parliament to support this agreement. If anyone representing the ACT votes against it, it will be to their eternal shame.

Mr Emerson: A point of order, Mr Speaker.

MR SPEAKER: I think the minister has concluded—but, yes, Mr Emerson?

Mr Emerson: It is on responsiveness to the question, under standing order 118AA. The question was about what the government is doing to address other barriers to realise the opportunities. We heard about the opportunities realised through the potential trade agreement but nothing about those barriers.

MR SPEAKER: On the point of order, Chief Minister?

MR BARR: I did respond in the very first sentence to say I do not accept that those are barriers to the advances that we are going to get. This is about accessing export markets; it is not about our internal settings. That should be pretty clear. The benefit for Canberra businesses is the business they will undertake and secure in Europe. It has got nothing to do with our tax rates here.

MR SPEAKER: Thanks Minister. There is no point of order, Mr Emerson. I accept that he pivoted pretty quickly after responding to your question; however, I think he was responsive, albeit briefly.

Public schools—staffing

MS LEE: Mr Speaker, my question is to the Minister for Education. Minister, last year a number of government high schools in Tuggeranong were forced to operate on reduced timetables, with some students regularly sent home early because schools were unable to fully staff classes. Minister, are all ACT government high schools currently operating on a full five-days-per-week timetable? And if not, which schools are on reduced timetables?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I will take the question on notice, and I would just note that no assumptions should be drawn out of the fact that I am taking the question on notice in terms of whether or not that is the case.

MS LEE: Minister, what analysis, if any, was conducted to assess whether school budget cuts would affect schools' ability to operate a full five-days-per-week timetable?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I reject the premise of the question in the way that Ms Lee has described the budget cuts. As I have said multiple times in this place, the 26-27 budget has—

Mr Cocks: Point of order—

MR SPEAKER: Stop the clocks, please.

Mr Cocks: I believe that the minister is actually trying to debate the question itself, whereas it was a very clear question about what analysis has been done.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Prefaced on an incorrect assumption.

MR SPEAKER: I am not sure, Mr Cocks. I think we are very early on into the minister's response. Let's see how she goes. I will listen attentively.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Thank you, Mr Speaker. As I was saying, there have not been cuts to the education budget. An additional \$40 million was put into the education budget of \$1.2 billion. What we are doing, Mr Speaker, is exactly what the Public School System Resourcing Review indicated we should be doing, which is allocating resources on the basis of equity to our schools. I want to emphasise, Mr Speaker, that school budgets for the 2027 year have not been finalised, and the Education Directorate is working with all of the principals and school leaders to ensure that the indicative budgets that were provided, that we understand what the implications of those were. There is \$8 million set aside as an exceptions pool for those who are going to be challenged in transitioning to meeting the student resource allocation budgets. That have been provided on the basis of the recommendations of the school resourcing review. So no decision has been made. There have been no cuts.

Ms Lee: Point of order: I know that she has only got 30 seconds left, but the question specifically was in relation to any analysis about the effect that it would have on the schools' ability to operate a full five-day-a-week timetable.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Well, given that the budgets for schools for 2027 have not been finalised, that is the work that the Education Directorate is currently doing with principals to understand what budget they need to ensure that they can continue to operate effectively.

MR PARTON: Minister, can you guarantee that no ACT government school will be required to operate on a reduced timetable week in 2027 due to your school budget cuts?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I can guarantee that there have not been cuts to the education budget in the 26-27 budget, and I can guarantee that the Education Directorate will continue to work with every principal and with every school to understand what the transition to the student resource allocation budgeting means to them. And we will continue to work with principals to understand how that transition is made. But it is very important, Mr Speaker, that if you conduct a major review like the Public School System Resourcing Review, that you actually take the recommendations seriously.

Now, I also understand that the receipt of the early budget projections under the SRA model to school principals have caused some legitimate concern and distress in the school communities. And that is why I am seeking to assure the school communities that the Education Directorate will work with every principal and every school to understand what the potential implications of those budgets were; why we have an exceptions process in place to ensure that every school gets the funding that it needs to

operate efficiently and effectively; but most importantly, to ensure that every school can be an excellent first choice for every family in the ACT.

We have got a set of recommendations to support us to do that. We will take seriously those recommendations, but we will also take seriously the feedback from our principals, from our school leaders, from our teachers, and of course from parents, carers and students themselves.

Public schools—senior secondary language courses

MISS NUTTALL: My question is to the Minister for Education. Minister, we understand that after fears Lake Ginninderra College would stop offering the last college-level Indonesian language courses in the ACT, you advised the community, via Balai Bahasa Indonesia ACT, that:

UCSSC Lake Ginninderra will include Indonesian in its 2027 subject offerings and will determine whether the program runs next year based on student demand and teacher availability.

If we lose this course, young people in public schools will no longer be able to study Indonesian in college anywhere in the ACT. What is your directorate doing to support Lake Ginninderra, its staff and its current and prospective students, in promoting, supporting and retaining this Indonesian language course, and when will we know for sure that this course is continuing?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Miss Nuttall for the question, but I think she has answered it in her question. I have provided the information as she has indicated, and Lake Ginninderra College will—sorry, Lake Tuggeranong College, no Lake Ginninderra, sorry, confused between electorate and college—Lake Ginninderra College will make that decision on the basis of teacher availability and student interest in undertaking Indonesian language study.

One of the challenges that we have with languages is in relation to what is taught across a particular school network. One of the things that the Education Directorate is looking at in its language strategy is how do we ensure that there are actually pathways within school networks, within enrolment areas, for continuous language learning for particular languages.

There are, of course, a lot of languages that are not taught in ACT schools. I understand it would be a real shame to lose Indonesian. I am certainly not saying that is going to happen, but we cannot make decisions on the basis of one or two students and no teacher availability for a whole school system. So, I definitely understand the concern that people are raising in relation to this matter. We will continue to work on having language pathways across our language programs, but I have no further information in relation to Lake Ginninderra and Indonesian beyond what has already been provided to the community.

MISS NUTTALL: Minister, if the course is cancelled, will you consider a centralised language school model? If not, what is your alternative for current year 10 students wanting to study Indonesian in lieu of a centralised language school model?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: We are continuing to consider what the next steps are in terms of language education, and so I am happy to take the question on notice and come back to Miss Nuttall with some more information in relation to that.

MR BRADDOCK: What work is your directorate doing more broadly to ensure language continuity across the ACT public education system in the context of the college budget cuts?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I think it is probably best that I take that quite broad question on notice and come back to the Assembly with some answers.

Lakes and waterways—Molonglo Reach—waterskiing

MR MILLIGAN: Mr Speaker, my question is to the Minister for Sport and Recreation, Minister, the ACT Government permits waterskiing at Molonglo River for specifically approved users, while general recreational access remains restricted. Minister, what specific safety risk prevents a licensed member of the public using Molonglo River?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. I have got to admit I have not yet been briefed on waterskiing requirements on the Molonglo River, but I will go and find out, and I will come back on notice.

MR MILLIGAN: Thank you. Minister, why does the government restrict recreational access rather than establishing clear and consistent access criteria based on the demonstrated safety and environmental risks?

MR STEEL: Thank you. I will come back on notice to that one as well.

MS LEE: I assume he is going to take it on notice, but, Minister, after almost 15 years of restricted public access, will you consider whether controlled recreational waterskiing can return to Molonglo River in time for future summer seasons?

MR STEEL: I will seek some advice from the department and come back in relation to that matter.

Housing affordability—portable rental bonds

MS VASSAROTTI: My question is to the Attorney-General, who has responsibility for residential tenancies. The minister would know that both Victoria and New South Wales have introduced portable bond schemes in recent years. South Australia will introduce a scheme next year. Even the ACT Labor membership believe this is a good idea. Has the ACT government done an analysis of the financial pressures faced by renters—in particular, around the requirement to finance a bond for a new rental while waiting for the bond to be returned from the previous rental?

MS CHEYNE: I will clarify this, but I do not believe that we have. Certainly in light of the motion that we are debating tomorrow and our understanding of the schemes in South Australia, Victoria and New South Wales, we have been considering the costs

that have been associated in setting up those schemes, including the administrative ones, and how they may relate to and/or seek to alleviate any pressures that there might be for renters in the ACT. I think we all agree with the objective of portable rental bond schemes, but it is not as simple as the government holding onto a bond and moving it to the next residential tenancy agreement. It relies on, effectively, like tenants moving into another tenancy—effectively the same people—and it does not really assist when there is a schism or a break-up in a relationship or a tenancy relationship. It really is a broader question of exactly what we are trying to solve, but I look forward to expanding on that in the debate tomorrow.

MS VASSAROTTI: Minister, I missed whether you actually answered this partially in your first answer. Has the ACT government consulted with the Victorian or New South Wales governments to explore whether a similar scheme could be introduced in the ACT?

MS CHEYNE: I do not think I used the word “consult” in any formal way, but of course we have relationships with those governments and I understand that some conversations have occurred. Certainly the feedback from those jurisdictions is that all the schemes have had significant start-up fixed costs, as well as significant ongoing costs. I would note that all three of those jurisdictions seek to recoup some of those ongoing administrative costs by requiring people to pay a fee to enter the portable rental bond scheme. I think it is \$25 a year in New South Wales and Victoria, and SA is contemplating a fee of between \$35 and \$50. That is a distinct difference from what is currently on the notice paper for tomorrow.

MISS NUTTALL: Minister, do you know how much the average tenant would need to front up to pay a bond here in the ACT?

MS CHEYNE: I think it is about \$2,000 for a tenancy, based on data from 2023-24. Perhaps it is a bit over that—maybe \$2,300. It is hard to pin down an average, but I believe, from what we have previously published on bond data, that, if we apply an average, it is about that. But, of course, there are all sorts of different tenancy arrangements, and how much someone might pay for one tenancy can vary very significantly to another.

Transport Canberra—MyWay+

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

Minister, I have heard of situations where school buses will be observed as travelling full but at the same time record negligible tap-ons and tap-offs through the MyWay+ system. At the same time, the MyWay+ family accounts feature, which would allow parents to efficiently manage the MyWay+ cards of their children, is a launch feature that remains in development. Minister, are you treating these two issues as related? What is the government doing about these particular issues?

MS CHEYNE: I thank Mr Braddock for his question and acknowledge his long-term support for public transport and also his particular ongoing interest in MyWay+ and holding NEC to account. I do believe that there is a degree of correlation here, but I am

not treating them as the exact same issue.

I certainly acknowledge—as my predecessor did as well—that the delay in delivering family accounts is regrettable. It was intended to be part of MyWay+ and it is something that remains outstanding. I recognise that it has made it harder than it should be for parents to manage their children’s cards, including where it might extend to situations to confirm whether a child’s card has sufficient funds on it. So I do accept that there are likely instances where that does relate.

But it is premature at this stage to entirely attribute the negligible tap-ons that Mr Braddock describes solely to that delay. There can be, I suspect, instances of sheer noncompliance, or there might be equipment or data recording issues separately. All of those may be contributing. Transport Canberra is examining those causes, and I can confirm that it is still progressing family accounts with Digital Canberra and the NEC.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, does the government have an anticipated or target date for the commencement of family accounts? If yes, can you please enlighten the Assembly?

MS CHEYNE: I wish I did, but I don’t. There is no confirmed date currently available. I acknowledge that this capability has taken much too long to deliver. While I cannot announce a date until there is a tested and credible delivery schedule, I have made it clear—and I think I owe it to the Assembly and to the community—that an indefinite “in development” status is simply not acceptable.

What I have learnt since taking this portfolio is that family accounts are more complex than originally anticipated, in that they require some identity elements, consent, privacy and security controls. Transport Canberra, Digital Canberra and NEC are all working through those dependencies. I certainly hope, with Digital Canberra taking a greater role now in the management of the contract with NEC but also with the delivery of the digital capability, we will see some progress before too long. But I also completely accept that I cannot continue to say, “We’re working on it.”

MS CLAY: Minister, how much fare revenue does the ACT government collect from school students each year?

MS CHEYNE: I will have to take that on notice, simply because the calculation needs to account for discounted fares, fare caps, transfers and the free travel that is available under the Student Transport Program, together with incomplete validations. I am happy to seek that data, and I will look to provide the Assembly with a properly reconciled figure. I just do not have the breakdown of those figures that I would be able to sum together in a way that would be reliable.

Roads—congestion

MR COCKS: My question is to the Minister for City and Government Services. Minister, in what may be the greatest understatement I have ever uttered in this chamber, residents in my electorate of Murrumbidgee are reporting gridlock conditions on main thoroughfares like John Gorton Drive, Cotter Road and Adelaide Avenue. As a result, congestion levels on suburban streets are rising beyond safe levels as people

seek alternative routes. This is creating a litany of consequences, from noise disturbances to crash hazards, and flow on impacts to teachers and LSAs just trying to get to work and support vulnerable kids. Minister, why is this city's road network failing so many Canberrans?

MS CHEYNE: While I am not diminishing Mr Cocks's description of what is occurring, I do not agree with the premise that our road network is failing Canberrans. What I would acknowledge is that we have an extraordinary number of upgrades occurring at once, and we have had some significant closures. Indeed, there is a significant period of closure for Coppins Crossing Road, which I anticipate will be the last time before we get to a point when the bridge is formally opened.

We are not going to shy away from the work that needs to be undertaken for our roads in the ACT, and there is a considerable amount. We have an extensive road network. The extent of our road network, both in the length and width of our roads, is considerably higher than in other jurisdictions. It requires a lot of maintenance effort. It requires a lot of planning and civil engineering work. We are getting on with the job, but I also appreciate that it has consequences when there is plenty of work occurring all at once—let alone with the works in the city and with Commonwealth Avenue Bridge. We do actively monitor this. We have bluetooth sniffer devices, which effectively pick up on when a mobile device is travelling through an area. We also have CCTV cameras that report through to our transport centre, and we can adjust traffic lights for flow where necessary. But, of course, we need to make those decisions in a careful way, given they will inevitably have flow-on consequences.

MR COCKS: Minister, does the government take any responsibility for the increases in speeding, collisions, near misses and frustrated driving on suburban streets located off congested main roads?

MS CHEYNE: No, we do not, because, ultimately, those who have a licence and those who are driving a vehicle are agreeing to abide by longstanding, well-known road rules. It is not something that the government can take responsibility for—for every individual decision. My message to the community is to please be patient and to consider leaving earlier or later if you have that flexibility with your workplace, and I certainly understand that not everybody does.

We are looking forward to the opening of Molonglo River Bridge around the end of this year, and I think that is going to make an enormous difference for how people travel through this city. And, pleasingly, the Commonwealth Avenue Bridge has not been as disruptive as we expected, and with the switchover to occur in January, we also expect that to be relatively smooth and to, effectively, create the same environment that Canberrans have got used to this year but on the other span of the bridge. We are trying to take into account all of the pressures that are occurring across the city, but there are a lot. Some of these factors depend not just on whether they are related to the school holidays or on what time might be the most convenient but simply on when we are able to align all of the contractors and services and equipment that we need.

MR CAIN: Minister, is suburban congestion a low-priority issue for this government?

MS CHEYNE: Well, obviously not. You only have to look at the extraordinary

contribution that both the ACT government and the Australian government are making to assist Canberrans move around our city. We did inherit the Y plan. We did inherit a whole lot of decisions that have cost successive governments a lot of money. We are getting on with the job of making it easier to move around, not just with our roads but with our active travel network as well. We certainly appreciate the support we have received from the federal government in co-funding many of those initiatives.

Mr Barr: Mercifully, Mr Speaker, it is time: all further questions can be placed on the notice paper.

Supplementary answers to questions without notice

Drugs—suspected drug overdose deaths

MRS MORRIS: Mr Speaker, I am seeking your guidance. I am hoping to get some clarification on a response that was given by the police minister in relation to my question on lethal drugs in the community. The minister's response to my point of order inferred that marijuana grow houses might be linked to the deaths that we have seen, whereas the police have publicly reported that they believe those deaths were opioid related. I am hoping to get some clarification around that. If the minister does have any information relating those deaths to the marijuana grow houses and the police operations that she was referring to, if she could please provide that to the Assembly.

MR SPEAKER: Do you have anything on that point of order, Minister?

DR PATERSON: Mrs Morris's original question was about whether the police were doing anything to disrupt illicit drugs in the ACT, and that is when I said that the disruption activities involved grow houses and the OMCG arrests.

MR SPEAKER: My recollection, and I will have to think back to the question, is that you asked a question about the recent overdoses and what the government was doing about those. In the response, the minister gave an expansive answer on some of the activities that the government and the police were taking with drug law enforcement more generally, so I think she was responsive. I do not think she deliberately connected those two, so I do not think there is a point of order under 118AA. I think she was responsive. Whether you think she is accurate or not is slightly separate.

MRS MORRIS: Thank you, Mr Speaker. My point of order went to whether those police operations were involving the lethal drugs, and then she gave that response, which is why I was just asking for clarification.

MR SPEAKER: I do not think there is a point of order, but I will go back and check the answer to make sure I have not got that wrong; if I have, I will come back, but I do not think there is a point of order, Mrs Morris.

MRS MORRIS: Thank you.

Palliative care—Community Options palliative care service

MR PARTON: I rise because I believe that Minister Paterson misled the Assembly in her answer to the supplementary questions of the first question that was asked today in

question time. This was in regard to the funding for Community Options. Although Ms Stephen-Smith said, in her response to suggestions on ABC radio, that Community Options just decided to shut down one day and that that decision had no relationship with the government's decision to discontinue their funding in this space, and that if she is incorrect, then she withdraws, the minister in the supplementary question was asked about whether the government had reduced, changed or otherwise altered the funding for Community Options in any way. She continued to assert that there was no change.

Mr Speaker, I would draw members' attention to the Community Options Facebook page from August 10 where they state that Community Options is preparing to close after the ACT government confirmed that no funding had been identified in the 2026-27 ACT budget for the Community Options proposed—

Ms Stephen-Smith: Mr Speaker, is this really a point of order or is this just Mr Parton making a speech?

MR SPEAKER: This is matters arising from question time, and he is raising a concern that the minister has misled the Assembly. It is not directly a point of order, but he is, I imagine, leading to asking the minister to withdraw. If he believes that the Assembly was misled, it is right that he highlights that and provides an opportunity for the minister to withdraw. That is what is happening, as I understand.

Ms Stephen-Smith: He is drawing on, now, a completely different source of information to twist what he had actually asked about, versus what he is now saying about Community Options. His supplementary question was specifically about the palliative care funding and the CAPS and CASP funding.

MR SPEAKER: Minister, Mr Parton is making an assertion that this House has been misled. I will let him conclude, which he is going to do shortly, and then I will provide an opportunity for the minister to respond.

MR PARTON: Indeed, the Community Options Facebook page is very clear that they believe that their preparation for closure is on the basis of not receiving funding from the ACT government.

I seek leave to table communication between Brendan Taber, the Chief Executive Officer, and the government regarding that funding.

Leave granted.

MR PARTON: I table the following document:

Budget Submission—Flexible Family Supports, prepared by Community Options, dated 28 November 2025.

In this documentation, Brendan Taber indicates that information about the proposed community transition support program is material to the board's decision around whether they close or not.

I also seek leave table the Community Options budget submission, Mr Speaker.

Leave granted.

MR PARTON: I further table:

Addendum to CEO recommendation, prepared by Community Options CEO, undated.

And the budget submission regarding flexible family supports pertaining to palliative care received no response at any point from the government, so my belief, Mr Speaker, is that the minister has misled the Assembly by suggesting very emphatically that there has been no change to government funding for Community Options.

MR SPEAKER: Dr Paterson?

DR PATERSON: Mr Speaker, there has been no change to Community Options funding. ACT government funds Community Options for two programs: one is the palliative care program, and the other is a women and babies support program. Both of those programs have ongoing funding. The ACT government was notified by Community Options on 21 July, when their CEO wrote to the ACT government and said: “This is Community Options formal confirmation that we will not seek to renew or extend our current palliative care deed beyond its expiry on 31 December.”

What Mr Parton is referring to is a community budget submission. They do not have funding for that. They were going for new funding. I am sure it is disappointing to the organisation that they did not receive funding, but there has been no change to the Community Options funding from the ACT government.

MR SPEAKER: Thank you. I take it that the minister’s position is that she has not misled; is that right?

DR PATERSON: Yes.

MR SPEAKER: So that being the case, Mr Parton has raised a concern, and the response is that she has not misled. If you want to pursue this matter further, Mr Parton, then you will need to do it through a substantive motion. I do not know if we can keep going with the back and forth, unless you are very brief—Minister?

Ms Stephen-Smith: I am now going to raise a concern that Mr Parton has actually misled the Assembly because he, in making all of these assertions, has said there was no response whatsoever to the Community Options budget submission. And I said, in response to the question that I answered, that I have met with Community Options. I did specifically meet with community options to discuss their proposals for new funding. As Minister Paterson said, those proposals for new funding were not successful through the budget process, but Mr Parton has claimed that there was no response whatsoever, and that is not true.

MR SPEAKER: Members, thank you for raising your concerns—Mr Parton, and thank you for your response, minister. The minister does not accept that she has misled the

parliament, and if you believe she has, Mr Parton, you will need to move a substantive motion. Are there any further matters arising from question time?

Housing affordability—portable rental bonds

MS CHEYNE: Just to clarify—I was not too far off, Mr Speaker—in response to Miss Nuttall’s question about the what the average value is of rental bonds lodged. I was, I think, drawing from 2023-24 figures, but I have 2024-25 figures, and the average value of bonds lodged in 2024-25 was \$2,407.

Papers

Mr Speaker presented the following papers:

Committee Reports—Schedule of Government Responses—Eleventh Assembly, as at 11 September 2026.

Estimates 2026-2027—Select Committee—Report—Inquiry into the Appropriation Bill 2026-2027 and Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill 2026-2027—ACTEWAGL’s response to recommendation 58, dated 9 September 2026.

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

ACT Small Business Strategy—2023-2026—Progress update 2026, undated, together with a statement.

Australian Crime Commission (ACT) Act, pursuant to subsection 51(5)—Board of the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission—Chair Annual Report—2024-25, dated 17 August 2026.

Civil Law (Wrongs) Act, pursuant to subsection 4.56(3) of Schedule 4—Professional Standards Councils—Annual report 2025-2026, undated.

Custodial Inspector Act, pursuant to subsection 30(2)—Review of a Critical Incident by the ACT Custodial Inspector—Detained person on detained person assaults: 3 May, 9 August and 8 September 2025—Government response, dated September 2026.

Electrified transport uptake—Assembly resolution of 5 May 2026—Government response, dated September 2026.

Freedom of Information Act, pursuant to section 39—Copy of notice provided to the Ombudsman—Freedom of Information request—Canberra Institute of Technology—Decision not made in time—FOIs 2025-010(1), 2026-002 and 2026-003, dated 31 July 2026.

Subordinate legislation (including explanatory statements unless otherwise stated)

Legislation Act, pursuant to section 64—

ACT Teacher Quality Institute Act and Financial Management Act—ACT Teacher Quality Institute Board Appointment 2026 (No 4)—Disallowable Instrument DI2026-194 (LR, 31 August 2026).

Animal Welfare Act—Animal Welfare (Advisory Committee) Establishment

2026—Disallowable Instrument DI2026-190 (LR, 24 August 2026).

Architects Act—

Architects Board (Academic Architect Member) Appointment 2026—Disallowable Instrument DI2026-196 (LR, 3 September 2026).

Architects Board (Commercial Lawyer Member) Appointment 2026—Disallowable Instrument DI2026-195 (LR, 3 September 2026).

Architects Board (Registered Architect Member) Appointment 2026—Disallowable Instrument DI2026-197 (LR, 3 September 2026).

Board of Senior Secondary Studies Act—Board of Senior Secondary Studies Appointment 2026 (No 4)—Disallowable Instrument DI2026-189 (LR, 20 August 2026).

Cemeteries and Crematoria Act—

Cemeteries and Crematoria (Fees) Determination 2026 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2026-198 (LR, 31 August 2026).

Cemeteries and Crematoria (Governing Board Chair) Appointment 2026—Disallowable Instrument DI2026-179 (LR, 23 July 2026).

Cemeteries and Crematoria (Governing Board Deputy Chair) Appointment 2026—Disallowable Instrument DI2026-180 (LR, 23 July 2026).

Cemeteries and Crematoria (Governing Board Member) Appointment 2026 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2026-181 (LR, 23 July 2026).

City Renewal Authority and Suburban Land Agency Act—City Renewal Authority and Suburban Land Agency (Authority Board Member) Appointment 2026 (No 2)—Disallowable Instrument DI2026-202 (LR, 14 September 2026).

Civil Law (Wrongs) Act—Civil Law (Wrongs) Australian Property Institute Valuers Limited Professional Standards Scheme 2026—Disallowable Instrument DI2026-186 (LR, 13 August 2026).

Court Procedures Act—Court Procedures Amendment Rules 2026 (No 2)—Subordinate Law SL2026-11 (LR, 31 July 2026).

Electoral Act—Electoral (Electoral Commission Chairperson) Appointment 2026—Disallowable Instrument DI2026-201 (LR, 9 September 2026).

Family Violence Act—Family Violence Amendment Regulation 2026 (No 1)—Subordinate Law SL2026-14 (LR, 20 August 2026).

Government Procurement Act—Government Procurement (Non-Public Employee Member) Appointment Revocation 2026 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2026-193 (LR, 31 August 2026).

Integrity Commission Act—Integrity Commission Regulation 2026—Subordinate Law SL2026-10 (LR, 27 July 2026).

Legal Profession Act—Legal Profession (Foreign Lawyer Registration Fee) Determination 2026—Disallowable Instrument DI2026-182 (LR, 23 July 2026).

Magistrates Court Act—Magistrates Court (Fair Trading Fuel Prices Infringement Notices) Regulation 2026—Subordinate Law SL2026-13 (LR, 10 August 2026).

Major Events Act—

Major Events (Floriade 2026) Declaration 2026—Disallowable Instrument DI2026-188 (LR, 17 August 2026).

Major Events (NRLW Canberra Raiders v Parramatta Eels Match) Notice 2026—Disallowable Instrument DI2026-183 (LR, 27 July 2026).

Major Events (Rugby Australia Wallaroos v Scotland Match) Notice 2026—Disallowable Instrument DI2026-184 (LR, 27 July 2026).

Official Visitor Act—

Official Visitor (Corrections Management) Appointment 2026 (No 2)—Disallowable Instrument DI2026-192 (LR, 27 August 2026).

Official Visitor (Corrections Management) Appointment 2026 (No 3)—Disallowable Instrument DI2026-200 (LR, 7 September 2026).

Official Visitor (Housing Assistance) Appointment 2026 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2026-191 (LR, 27 August 2026).

Property Developers Act—Property Developers (Fees) Determination 2026—Disallowable Instrument DI2026-185 (LR, 30 July 2026).

Race and Sports Bookmaking Act—Race and Sports Bookmaking (Sports Bookmaking Venues) Determination 2026 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2026-178 (LR, 10 August 2026).

Road Transport (General) Act—

Road Transport (General) Application of Road Transport Legislation (IEG Test Day) Declaration 2026—Disallowable Instrument DI2026-203 (LR, 14 September 2026).

Road Transport (General) Application of Road Transport Legislation (Polar Plunge Canberra) Declaration 2026 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2026-187 (LR, 14 August 2026).

Road Transport (Offences) Amendment Regulation 2026 (No 2)—Subordinate Law SL2026-12 (LR, 31 July 2026).

Road Transport (Safety and Traffic Management) Regulation 2017—Road Transport (Safety and Traffic Management) Traffic Offence Detection Device Approval 2026—Disallowable Instrument DI2026-199 (LR, 7 September 2026).

Leave of absence

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

That leave of absence be granted to Ms Barry for this sitting day due to personal reasons.

MR PARTON (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (3.23): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) palliative care is an essential component of a compassionate and effective health system, supporting people living with life-limiting illness to maximise their quality of life, maintain dignity and, where possible, receive care in the place of their choosing;
- (b) since 2013, Community Options Palliative Care Program has provided a non-clinical service that assists people to navigate the palliative care system, coordinate appropriate supports and remain safely and

- comfortably at home where that is their preference; and
- (c) the Government has not provided ongoing funding for the Community Options Palliative Care Program beyond the 2025-2026 financial year;
- (2) further notes that:
- (a) the loss of government funding will result in Community Options Palliative Care ceasing operations;
 - (b) the Community Options Palliative Care Project Evaluation identified significant unmet needs in the ACT palliative care system, including gaps in in-home support, respite, overnight care, allied health and home modifications;
 - (c) the ACT Government's review of palliative care services in 2023 identified fragmentation across the ACT palliative care system;
 - (d) palliative care is not solely an acute hospital service and must include accessible, coordinated and appropriately funded services delivered in people's homes and communities; and
 - (e) children and young people living with life-limiting illness have distinct palliative care needs which require age-appropriate, family-centred and coordinated services, including access to appropriate care in the home and community; and
- (3) calls on the Government to:
- (a) take immediate steps to ensure that Canberrans with life-limiting illness and their families have ongoing access to a dedicated non clinical, community-based palliative care service, including individualised case management, care coordination, practical and flexible support;
 - (b) ensure that this service is appropriately and sustainably funded, with funding arrangements sufficient to maintain the workforce, expertise, service capacity and referral pathways necessary to meet demand;
 - (c) undertake a comprehensive review of palliative care services in the ACT, including government and non-government providers, navigation pathways, gaps in clinical and non-clinical services, home based care, community-based care, hospice care and hospital based services, and ensure the review examines:
 - (i) the state of palliative care services, including the current and projected demand for palliative care;
 - (ii) access to respite, personal care, domestic assistance, allied health, bereavement support and other practical supports;
 - (iii) the extent to which existing services enable people to receive palliative care in their preferred place, including at home; and
 - (iv) includes a specific and dedicated assessment of paediatric and young people's palliative care;
 - (d) develop a Territory-wide palliative care action plan addressing identified gaps and setting measurable targets for access, coordination, quality, workforce and outcomes;
 - (e) ensure the action plan includes specific actions and measurable targets for paediatric and young people's palliative care; and
 - (f) report on the review and the proposed palliative care action plan to the

Assembly by 30 June 2027.

I rise today to speak about something that every one of us will eventually have to confront: the end of life and the choices we and our families will be confronted with when that time comes. Palliative care is about much more than managing symptoms. It is about dignity. It is about quality of life. It is about supporting families. And where it is the person's choice, we think it is about helping someone to remain in their own home, if they so choose, surrounded by the people that matter and the environment that comforts them.

This is why I have brought this motion before the Assembly today. It is because the ACT government, irrespective of their assertions in question time and other places, has allowed funding for an established community provider that delivers palliative care services to end. With that decision, comes the loss of practical support for some of the most vulnerable people in our community.

This is what this motion is all about: it is about whether this government is prepared to ensure that dying Canberrans and their families have access to the support they need when they need it. It provides something different, but equally important: practical, flexible and non-clinical support for people living with a life-threatening or a life-limiting illness and their families. It helps people navigate the system. It provides case management and coordination, and it helps people access the practical assistance they need to remain safely and comfortably at home.

We think that distinction matters, because when someone is dying, the challenges facing a family are not necessarily clinical. Sometimes it is getting the right equipment into the home. Sometimes it is helping the family understand what support is available. Other times it is simply having someone who understands the system and can help make things happen quickly. These are the things that can make the difference between someone being able to remain at home and someone having to leave home because their family simply cannot manage without support.

Community Options has been doing this work for years. It has developed the expertise. It has developed the relationships. It has developed an understanding of the needs of people and families dealing with end of life, but the government has chosen not to renew funding for this provider. They can spin that whatever way they like, but that is what has occurred.

The government has said that it is working with Community Options to transition the service, but there is an important question that needs to be answered: what exactly is being transitioned? Because if what is being transitioned is case management and navigation but the flexible funding required to provide practical support in people's homes is not continuing, then this is not a like-for-like transition. You cannot navigate someone to a service that does not exist. You cannot tell a family that their loved ones can remain at home and then remove the practical support that makes that possible. You cannot describe that as a seamless transition.

The government needs to be very clear about what practical non-clinical support will actually be available to dying Canberrans without this program, because the people affected by this decision are not abstract numbers; they are people who are dying. They

are husbands and wives. They are parents. They are children. They are brothers and sisters. They are families who are already dealing with one of the most difficult experiences imaginable. They should not also have to fight their way through a fragmented service system to get the support they need. This is also why this motion is deliberately broader than Community Options.

Let me be clear: this motion does not ask the Assembly to determine which organisations should receive funding; it asks the government to take immediate steps to ensure that a dedicated, non-clinical community palliative care service is available in the ACT. I do not know about you, Mr Assistant Speaker, but I think that is a reasonable expectation of any government.

The government is not just hearing about the challenges in this sector for the first time. The ACT government's 2023 review of palliative care identified fragmentation across the system, multiple referral pathways and a lack of centralised data about community-based palliative care. It raises an important question for this government: what has changed since that review?

We now need to know whether those identified gaps have been addressed, whether people can navigate the system more easily, whether community services are meeting demand and whether the government has the information it needs to understand where unmet need remains.

The answer cannot simply be that another service or another referral pathway exists. A referral pathway is only useful if there is a service at the end and if that service has the capacity to provide the support that the person actually needs. If that is not the case, it is just a bureaucratic box-ticking exercise. Those findings should have been a call to action. Instead, we now have an established community service facing the loss of its funding.

This motion also calls for the government to look again at the adequacy of the system, not simply to commission another report and put it on a shelf but to examine what has actually been implemented from the previous review, what remains outstanding and whether the current system is meeting the needs of Canberrans.

Importantly, that review must include children and young people. Palliative care for a child or a young person is profoundly different. It is not simply a smaller version of adult palliative care. It involves families, parents and siblings. It can involve years of complex care. It can involve the need for support in the home, respite for families, coordination between specialists and community providers, and difficult transitions as young people move into adulthood.

We need to know whether the ACT is getting this right. We need to know whether families can access the services they need, and we need to know whether the current workforce funding and service arrangements are sufficient to meet that need.

Mr Assistant Speaker, there is an important principle at the heart of this motion. Palliative care is not just about what happens in hospital. It is not just about a bed or a clinical service. Good palliative care is about the whole person. It is about the family. It is about their dignity. It is about giving people choice, and how and where they spend

the final days of their lives.

The government is investing in hospital-based palliative care, and that is important—it is extremely important—but we cannot build a palliative care system that is strong inside the hospital and weak in the community. The two have to work together. A person should not have to enter hospital simply because their family cannot access the practical support needed to care for them at home: it is not good for the patient; it is not good for their family; and, ultimately, it is not good for our health system.

Mr Assistant Speaker, there will come a time for every one of us when we have to confront the reality of the end. For many of us, the greatest wish will be a simple one: to be at home with family in familiar surroundings, with dignity and without unnecessary disruption. Government cannot prevent death, but the government can determine whether people have access to the support they need, when they reach the end of their life, and whether they are enabled to do so on their terms. That is the responsibility that we are asking this government to accept.

This motion asks the government to take immediate steps to ensure that non-clinical, community palliative care remains available in the ACT. It asks for sustainable arrangements that can support that service. It asks for a proper assessment of the gaps that remain across our palliative care system, and it asks for children and young people and their families to be properly considered as a part of that work. This is not an unreasonable request; it should not be a partisan issue. This is about whether we believe that dying Canberrans deserve dignity, choice and support. I believe they do, and I commend this motion to the Assembly.

MS VASSAROTTI (Kurrajong) (3.31), by leave: I move:

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

“(b) since 2013, Community Options Palliative Care Program has provided a case management service that assists people to navigate the palliative care system, coordinate appropriate non-clinical supports and remain safely and comfortably at home where that is their preference; and”.
2. Omit paragraph (1)(c), substitute:

“(c) Community Options is funded to deliver the Palliative Care Program to 31 December 2026. Community Options reports that they have been provided this funding on a year-on-year basis for the last five years and this is the first year since then that that yearly funding will not be provided. Community Options have also invested their own resources to provide those non-clinical services;
3. Omit paragraph (2)(a), substitute:

“(a) the loss of government funding has contributed to Community Options Palliative Care ceasing operations;”.
4. In paragraph (3)(a), after “flexible support”, insert: “and report to the Assembly as to who will be the replacement provider by the last sitting day of 2026;”.
5. Omit paragraph (3)(f), substitute:

“(f) report to the Assembly on the review by 30 June 2027 and publish the

proposed palliative care action plan to the Assembly by 31 December 2027.”.

I rise to speak both in support of this motion and the amendments that have been circulated in my name. I want to start by asking everyone in the chamber to take a moment to think about what it means to have dignity. What does it mean to be treated with respect? What does it mean to be recognised as a unique human being? What does it mean to be given the autonomy to make choices that align with values and preferences? These questions are really important, and maybe even more.

When someone is dying, they deserve to be treated with dignity. And to me, this means recognising that a person is more than just their illness. They have values, beliefs, fears and relationships. Being at the end of life’s journey should be profound, even when it is scary and challenging. The best way we can do this is by providing palliative care services that keep people comfortable and safe, ensuring they are being cared for and that they and their loved ones are supported through this time. Most often, people, if it is possible, want to do this at home and outside a clinical or hospital setting.

Those of us who have had the experience of walking with someone they love as they get to the end of their life know that being listened to, having the care and support that everyone needs, and being treated like a full person with desires and needs are key to all of this. To enable someone to die with dignity, it is not simply enough to address their symptoms or their clinical needs. We need to look after the whole person, find out what they need and do our best to meet them. And I say we do this because it is the mark of a civilised society—how we treat our most vulnerable.

In health care, we often see a great deal of focus on clinical needs, and this is vital. This provides a means to respond to symptoms, reduce pain and ensure people are getting what they need to have some quality of life as they journey towards the end of life. But we also need to reflect on their other needs: a body that is cared for; a physical environment that works at a time when mobility is reduced; and family members and carers who are able to provide the love and nurturing for their loved ones.

That is exactly what Community Options has been doing. For 13 years, they have gone to people with life-limiting illnesses, asked them what they need to die with dignity and met those needs. This has happened both because of government funding and funds that they have brought themselves. Whether people have needed someone to help them get washed and changed, to arrange pressure-area care, to arrange a family visit to provide some respite or to arrange an experience to create some memories at a time of great intensity, Community Options have stepped in to provide it. And they have provided it quickly, when someone, otherwise, might literally die waiting for commonwealth support.

It has been an important and meaningful service not just for those dying but also for their carers and families. As anyone who has been a caregiver of someone with a serious illness knows, being a caregiver is really hard, both physically and emotionally, and usually unpaid. The strain takes its toll. According to the Care Wellbeing Survey 2025 report conducted by Carers Australia, 61 per cent of unpaid carers did not report health levels of wellbeing, compared with only 34 per cent of the adult population in Australia. So, by providing personalised, non-clinical care to palliative care patients, Community

Options has been providing much needed support, not just for the dying patient but for their carers and families.

For all these reasons, the ACT Greens support this motion with the amendments that we have brought to the chamber. Abruptly cutting funding or being unclear about how arrangements have been changed means that there is a risk that people needing palliative care may die without dignity, and this lacks compassion, to put it mildly. We call on the ACT government to ensure that people are able to access non-clinical care, in addition to clinical palliative care, in a way that is individualised, responsive and quickly accessible.

Having a service that creates case management plans that are tailored to the individual and that provides personalised, flexible support is not a luxury. It is the least that we can do for people in their dying days. By granting those who are dying a sense of dignity, with the care and support they need, we can also maintain our own dignity. We recognise that with the announcement of the closure of Community Options, there is a need to work through how these services may be provided. But it is vital to ensure that the concerns being raised by services operating in the palliative care space, which have highlighted the need for non-clinical services, are responded to.

Ensuring we have compassionate, palliative health services is an issue that the ACT Greens have long been advocating for. It was, indeed, an item of our 2024 supply and confidence agreement with ACT Labor, and one of the proposed items in discussions we have had in recent months. We do acknowledge the funding that the ACT government is providing for palliative care, including the new acute palliative care unit. And the previous budget did include a \$4 million commitment to enhance community and home-based palliative care for Canberrans and to increase awareness. We really hope that that continues.

There has been a lot of debate in terms of what has actually occurred and in relation to these services moving forward. If nothing else, there is clearly a lack of clarity about what will be occurring from 2027. I really hope that this motion assists in getting the right information in place and assists the community to be confident that we will have this support at this really important time for individuals and families. I commend the motion to the Assembly.

DR PATERSON (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services, and Minister for Gaming Reform) (3.39): I rise today to respond to Mr Parton's motion and reaffirm the ACT government's commitment to ensuring that every Canberran can access high-quality palliative and end-of-life care when they need it.

Palliative care is a vital part of our healthcare system. Its purpose is to improve comfort, wellbeing and quality of life while managing distressing symptoms and supporting people and their families through serious illness. Importantly, palliative care is not limited to end-of-life care; it can be accessed at any stage of a life-limiting illness and can be delivered in the home, in hospital, in aged-care settings and in hospice care. Effective palliative care supports people physically, psychologically, socially and spiritually. It relieves pain and suffering and helps people live as fully as possible and supports families and carers through illness and bereavement.

As members would appreciate, navigating care at the end of life can be challenging. That is why the ACT government funds services that help people access and coordinate the support they need. Mr Parton's motion refers to Community Options and its palliative care program. Funding for that program in 2026-27 is \$141,708. Let me be absolutely clear: this funding remains in place. The ACT government has not withdrawn funding from Community Options, as I have said time and time again to Mr Parton. The amendments that Ms Vassarotti has circulated ensure that this motion is factually accurate as well as adjust the timeframe for delivery of work to review the system and deliver a plan. The funding supports two key functions: coordination of in-home, non-clinical support services for people with end-stage illness and their families; and, secondly, integration between home-based clinical palliative care, hospitals and community support services. Referrals to the Community Options program have been trending downward from 164 clients in 2022 to 78 in 2025. We understand from Community Options that this reflects the changing provider landscape and changing funding models arising from aged-care and NDIS reforms.

We recognise the valuable contribution Community Options has made over many years. Historically, the organisation supplemented delivery of these services through commonwealth disability and aged-care funding streams, which it ceased accessing in 2025. The board's decision to cease operations reflects a range of operational factors. The ACT government's funding of the palliative care program remains ongoing and is not central to that decision. Mr Parton's characterisation of the situation is simply incorrect. I acknowledge the expertise, the professionalism and the dedication of Community Options staff and the impact of the decision to close down their organisational operations. I acknowledge that the Community Options' own statement that Mr Parton read out says that "Community Options is preparing to close after the ACT government confirmed that no funding had been identified in the 2026-27 ACT budget for Community Options' proposed Community Transition Support Program." This is a completely different project proposal. This is not a palliative care program. While I do feel for Community Options that they were unsuccessful in their budget bid, I again reiterate to Mr Parton that this is a completely different program and the ACT government has ongoing funding for the palliative care program.

The Health and Community Services Directorate is working closely with the organisation to ensure continuity of care for clients and a smooth transition of services. I thank the board and the staff for their constructive engagement throughout this process. I have a meeting booked with the CEO, Mr Brendan Taber, on 13 October to discuss the transition and ensure services continue without disruption.

Mr Parton's motion calls on the government to maintain community-based non-clinical palliative care supports. I can absolutely confirm that these supports will continue. As we transition the palliative care program to another provider, the Community Assistance and Temporary Supports Program, which is over \$10 million a year, is already available to deliver these services. The Community Assistance and Temporary Supports Program provides up to six months of non-clinical support, including personal care, domestic assistance, food services, transport, social work and advocacy support, carer wellbeing programs and assistance connecting people with the services they need. This service closely aligns with those funded under the Community Options program and are delivered through established ACT community organisations, including Carers

ACT, Capital Region Community Services and Northside Community Service. Importantly, these supports sit within a much broader and comprehensive palliative care system across the ACT. Palliative care services are delivered through hospitals, specialist in-patient facilities, home-based care and aged-care settings, including the Canberra Hospital and North Canberra Hospital, Clare Holland House, community-based palliative care services and respite care.

Canberrans will soon benefit from a dedicated acute palliative care unit at Canberra Hospital, backed by \$23 million in the 2026-27 budget. This purpose-built ward will provide specialist multidisciplinary care for people with complex palliative needs in an environment designed specifically to support dignity, comfort and family involvement. Patients will no longer need to rely on general wards that were not designed for specialist palliative care.

Clare Holland House is a 20-bed inpatient palliative care unit where specially trained teams care for people with a life-limiting illness. I had the great privilege of going there on Friday to visit the team. Clare Holland House provides compassionate inpatient care in a beautiful and peaceful setting for individuals requiring pain and symptom management and end-of-life support. It was a true privilege to see firsthand the comfort, care and dignity provided to patients during some of life's most challenging moments.

Community specialist palliative care teams also provide clinical support in homes and residential aged-care facilities, helping people remain in familiar surroundings for as long as possible. The home-based palliative care team focuses on helping patients maintain comfort, dignity and quality of life in familiar surroundings. Services include specialist assessment, care planning, symptom management, multidisciplinary care, support for carers and families and 24-hour telephone advice. The palliative aged-care specialist team extends specialist palliative care expertise into every residential aged-care home across Canberra, helping residents access care and avoid unnecessary hospital transfers.

The government also funds specialist paediatric palliative care services through Canberra Health Services. This nurse-led service supports children with life-limiting conditions and their families, working closely with interstate providers and local specialist teams. Work is underway to strengthen paediatric palliative care pathways, increase local service capability and reduce barriers to care, including expanding access to admissions at Clare Holland House where clinically appropriate.

Respite care is another essential component of the ACT's palliative care system. The ACT government provides operational funding to Palliative Care ACT to deliver Leo's Place, which provides overnight and daytime respite in a home-like community setting for people with life-limiting illness and their carers. A new purpose-built six-bed facility in Garran is currently under construction and is expected to open in 2027. Palliative Care ACT also provides trained volunteers who offer practical support and companionship across hospitals, aged-care facilities, homes and Clare Holland House.

In conclusion, the facts are clear: contrary to the claims made in this motion and by Mr Parton, the ACT government is not leaving dying Canberrans without support. We are delivering a comprehensive system of palliative care services across hospital, hospice, residential aged care, and home-based settings, ensuring people can access the

right care in the right place at the right time. The commitment extends beyond maintaining services. We are actively expanding them. The ACT Health Services Plan identified the need for greater palliative care capacity. In response, the ACT government has funded and is delivering the new acute palliative care unit and investing in expanding inpatient and home-based palliative care services and increased support for respite services through Leo's Place. These are tangible investments that strengthen care for patients, families and carers.

I note the motion's call for a review of palliative care services and the development of a future plan for the sector. This is work the government is committed to undertaking. The amendment proposes a practical timeframe that allows meaningful engagement with consumers, carers and providers and ensures this work is completed thoughtfully and to a high standard. Palliative care is about dignity, compassion and support.

We have an incredible workforce in the ACT and an incredible volunteer network that support families at this greatest time of need. The ACT government remains firmly committed to strengthening these services and ensuring every Canberran can access the care that they need at life's most vulnerable moments.

MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi) (3.50): There is really no question, as I think everybody has mentioned today, that end-of-life care is one of the most sensitive and important functions of a health system. For every one of us in this place and around the territory, there will come a time when our lives will end. For those Canberrans who reach that moment gradually and knowingly, we certainly hope that they will be comfortable and supported, not just in their final moments but throughout that course from the diagnosis to the end. That is the purpose of palliative care.

While we naturally focus on how the health system can intervene and help people to put off that final moment, we also need to be mindful of the importance and the value of palliative and hospice care. Getting it right is essentially a gift to people in their final moments, ensuring it is, as much as possible, a moment where they are without pain and without stress. I deeply admire those health workers who choose to work and specialise in this field. It cannot be easy to know how every patient's story will end from the moment they arrive. I just do not know how they do it. We are fortunate to have palliative care services in the ACT, including Clare Holland House and Leo's Place, as the minister mentioned, which are highly regarded by patients, families, staff and experts. Those services are not perfect by any means, and the 2023 review identified a range of opportunities for how we can do better, and we are still to fully implement all of the changes it recommended. So, while I am grateful for the palliative care system we have, I recognise improvements are possible.

That said, while I recognise the motion is an attempt to improve the system, I do have some concerns with it, particularly with the divergence between what is being said and done here. As I understand it, Community Options, as we have heard—we have talked about it for a long time today—were self-funding the provision of palliative care services and have come to the conclusion that this is not sustainable. Separately, the government has been funding Community Options to provide a specific function, palliative care case management, and that funding will need to be redirected once Community Options closes at the end of the year.

In calling for the government to review palliative care and develop an action plan, this motion is implicitly calling for a significant increase in palliative care funding, because there is simply no way to provide the services without it for free. As I said, we certainly do not want to see a reduction. I understand the importance of this as even my neighbour, only a few weeks ago, required this in-home service. A quick, back-of-the-envelope calculation of what we are looking at tells me that the cost would be substantial. The 2025 evaluation noted that Community Options provided more than 10,000 hours of palliative care in the September quarter of 2025. On an annualised basis, using NDIS pricing, that gives us a cost of around \$3.5 million per year. On the other hand, Community Options reported 220,000 hours of service in 2022-23, which would scale to almost \$20 million per year. This is a significant range.

So it would be useful for me if the Canberra Liberals, perhaps in closing the debate, could provide the chamber with more information about the total cost of the commitment that they are hoping for today. It would be useful to know how they expect this commitment to be funded. If we are talking about as much as \$80 million over the forwards, that is substantial. I doubt that CHS has that much sitting in petty cash. So the funding can only come from one of three areas, and that is higher taxes, more debt or cuts elsewhere. Perhaps, when they close the debate, the Canberra Liberals could also provide us with information about how it intends to fund this commitment.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (3.54): I thank the Leader of the Opposition for bringing this motion to the Assembly today. As multiple members have now remarked, palliative care is an essential component of our health system that seeks to ensure dignity, comfort and quality health care and other care for those with life-limiting or terminal illnesses. It follows that the system must be backed by funding and appropriate action where it is needed to address service gaps so that our palliative care system in the ACT can meet the requirements of all of those who access it, as should be the aim of our health system more broadly.

As anyone who has engaged with the palliative care system knows, it extends far beyond the hospital or a doctor's office, and good palliative care can be transformative and empowering for both patients and their loved ones. Palliative care of course can involve GPs and other specialists, nurses, aged-care workers, social workers, physiotherapists, exercise physiologists, OTs, speech therapists, psychologists, volunteers and more, and it can be provided in a wide range of settings to make life more comfortable for those experiencing unbelievably challenging and life-limiting illnesses.

Given the diversity, complexity and importance of palliative care, I share Mr Parton's concerns about the gap that the closure of Community Options may leave for our community. I join my colleagues in acknowledging the invaluable work of Community Options over many decades, helping people to navigate and access palliative care and I thank them for that contribution and their many other contributions to our community. As CEO Brendan Taber reiterated, the people who currently rely on Community Options will not disappear when their services cease. Their needs are still there and, as we creep toward Community Options' closure at the end of this year, it is vital that this and any other service gaps are addressed by the government in a timely way. So I am glad Ms Vassarotti's amendments call for the government to advise the Assembly of a replacement provider of this particular service by the end of the year.

A core principle of our health system in a city as lucky and well-off as Canberra in a country as lucky and well-off as Australia should be that we meet the health and care requirements, whatever they may be, of those who need it. I understand, as the minister reflected, that a review of the current palliative care system was essentially already on the government's radar, and it is encouraging that the scope of this review has now been defined and agreed to, it appears, by the Assembly today.

I have previously expressed my reservations with the number of government action plans that often seem to go unfunded and sometimes unactioned and which, in my view, could perhaps be collated into a more comprehensive overarching ACT health plan, for instance. But, with that said, you cannot get much done without a plan for doing it. So I understand this is being brought forward by the opposition leader today, which is why I am supporting the motion. I look forward to hopefully seeing some tangible outcomes that address service gaps when it comes to palliative care on the back of this, through the delivery—not just the preparation but also implementation—of a clear plan, a plan that reflects our community's expectations of palliative care here in the ACT.

This motion offers an opportunity for us as an Assembly to be clear about exactly what those expectations are and to provide some accountability in delivering on the findings of this review and the commitments in the impending action plan on the back of that. So, again, I thank Mr Parton for bringing this motion forward today, which I will be supporting, as it appears it will be amended.

Amendments agreed to.

MR PARTON (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (3.57): I want to finish by directly dealing with a number of things that we have heard across the day, from ABC Radio this morning to later in the debate. Look, I think that the minister is attempting to rewrite what has actually happened here. She says that the funding has not been cut. She says the service is continuing. She says that Community Options are simply no longer able to deliver it. She says that the government is working through a transition to an alternative provider.

I spoke to Brendan Taber via text message during this debate and I said to Mr Taber, “Dr Paterson is adamant that there has been no withdrawal of funding to Community Options on the palliative care front. She is adamant that there is ongoing funding for the palliative care component to Community Options, and that it is only closing because you are closing the service; you cannot continue.” He responded by saying:

The palliative care case management funding is funded to \$140,000, and it pays for a case manager and nothing else. The budget submission was for in-home clinical services that were not funded. The current funded program of case management is not fit for purpose. We cannot case-manage people to nowhere when their wish is to die at home and they cannot access the actual in-home support they need. It is the in-home support that is rapid and flexible, and that is what is not funded.

And I said to Brendan, “So it is like the government is saying, ‘We are going to continue to fund the bus driver; we have just taken the bus away. So, you still have the bus driver, we have just taken the bus away’”. And Brendan said, “Yes, that is—”

Dr Paterson: Point of order.

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: Mr Parton, could you please take your seat? Dr Paterson?

Dr Paterson: Mr Parton is completely bending the truth on this one. This is blatantly not true.

Mr Cocks: Point of order, Mr Speaker.

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: Can I just please have 30 seconds from Dr Paterson, and then afterwards your point of order?

Mr Cocks: Sorry, in the point of order, Dr Paterson has, I would say, been unparliamentary in her language by alleging that Mr Parton has bent the truth, which would require a substantive motion. I would ask that you direct the minister to either withdraw or maintain parliamentary language.

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: Minister, what is your point of order exactly?

Dr Paterson: I will withdraw my point of order.

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you, Dr Paterson. I believe all points of order are exhausted.

MR PARTON: I will continue if I could, directly quoting one of the major stakeholders in this debate—directly quoting them.

Dr Paterson: Misrepresenting.

MR PARTON: I am directly quoting a conversation that I had during this debate.

Mr Cocks: Point of order.

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: Members. Yes, Mr Cocks?

Mr Cocks: The minister is now calling out misrepresenting. I believe that also falls into the same category of unparliamentary language.

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: The minister is also interjecting, which is something that the members on my right love to point out on regular occasion. I would like to argue, if the minister is of the view that she has been misrepresented, she can move her motion to that regard.

Dr Paterson: I apologise and withdraw.

MR PARTON: If I could, Mr Deputy Speaker, I would like to get back to this conversation that I had with one of the major stakeholders in this space. I said to Mr Taber, “So it is like they are saying, ‘We are continuing to fund the bus driver, but we are just removing the bus?’” And Mr Taber said, “Yes, that is correct”. But he then

did point out that the bus has not been funded by the ACT government. He said, “We have used our own funds in the last 12 months, hoping that they would fund the budget submission, and that has not occurred.”

There are a number of important questions that the government still has not answered here. Because the minister says that the government is working through a transition to an alternative provider, and we still do not know who the alternative provider is.

The organisation that has delivered this service is telling us it can no longer do so because of a lack of government funding. The people who deliver the service are telling us they are devastated. And importantly, the sector has made very clear representations to me that they are not aware of the government’s supposed transition to an alternative provider. So, we have got no bus driver and no bus.

If there is a transition plan, where is it? Who has been engaged? Who will provide the service? When will they commence? And most importantly, will there be any interruption to the support currently provided to people who are dying, and to their families?

I do not think these are unreasonable questions, Mr Deputy Speaker. They are the most basic questions that should be able to be answered when the government tells Canberrans that a service is continuing. It does not look to me as though it is. The minister says the opposition is presenting this as a service shutting down. We are not. Community Options is telling us that it can no longer deliver the service. That is the fact at the centre of this debate.

The government can say the funding line in a budget has not been removed, but funding a service and actually having a service delivered are not the same thing. If the government has not secured another provider, then there is a gap. If there is a transition underway, then there is a period in which that transition has to occur.

And if the government cannot tell this Assembly who is going to provide the service, then I think it is entirely reasonable for Canberrans to ask, “What is actually happening?” Because these are not abstract services. This is not a program where someone can simply just wait a few months while the government works out a new contracting arrangement. This is support for people at the end of their lives; for families who are exhausted; for carers who need assistance; for people who have made a very clear choice about how they want to spend their final days. And, for decades, Community Options has built the knowledge, relationships and trust necessary to provide that support. And it is why we think this is desperately important.

The former minister herself acknowledged this morning that the transition will take time. She acknowledged that it is sad and acknowledged that Community Options has provided these services for decades. Is this government so out of touch that they think they can have it both ways and that nobody is going to ask questions?

It cannot tell us that everything is continuing as normal, while simultaneously telling us that the provider is leaving and a transition to someone else is being worked through. Those two things are not the same.

And there is another issue that I want to put directly to the government. Last week we asked the new minister about the new acute palliative care ward at Canberra Hospital. We asked when it would open. We asked questions about the service. And we could not get clear answers. Today, the former minister has told the public that the ward is opening very soon—and I welcome the opening of an acute palliative care ward, of course I do. But it raises a very important question about the direction of palliative care in this territory, because there is a fundamental difference between providing people with a choice to receive support in their home and community, and providing more capacity for people who are already in hospital.

In regards the concerns raised by Ms Castley, the cost per year for in-home services is \$249,983.60. And the total for both case management and in-home services is in the region of \$400,000. That is all I have got to say, Mr Deputy Speaker. I am done.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Molonglo Valley—crime

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (4.06): Together with Mrs Morris, I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) residents of Wright, Coombs, Denman Prospect and surrounding areas have long raised serious concerns about community safety, including home invasions, property crime and police response times;
- (b) residents attending recent community safety meetings have reported that they fear for their safety in their community and in their own homes;
- (c) in some cases, residents have given up reporting crimes because they do not believe an effective response will follow;
- (d) prior to the 2024 election, ACT Labor committed to building the Molonglo Police Station as one part of a community support hub in the Molonglo Town Centre;
- (e) Molonglo Valley remains without a local police station; and
- (f) the Government has not provided a specific timetable for construction or opening of the promised police station;

2. acknowledges that:

- (a) residents have a right to feel safe in their homes and communities; and
- (b) community confidence in policing depends on visible police presence, effective responses to reported crime and confidence that concerns raised by residents are taken seriously; and

3. calls on the Government to:

- (a) immediately increase visible police patrols in Wright, Coombs, Denman Prospect and surrounding Molonglo Valley suburbs;
- (b) urgently deliver the Molonglo Valley police station;
- (c) publish a clear delivery timetable, including planning, funding, construction and anticipated opening; and

- (d) report to the Assembly on progress against these actions before the 2026-27 Budget Review.

This motion is about something pretty straight forward. People have a right to feel safe in their own homes. They should be able to put their children to bed without worrying about someone trying the door in the middle of the night. They should be able to leave their car in the driveway without wondering whether it will still be there in the morning. They should be able to feel confident that when something goes wrong and when they call the police, help will be there.

Those simple propositions are all that the residents in the Molonglo Valley are asking for in this motion that we bring on their behalf today. Not some extraordinary level of service or special treatment. Basic community safety. The things that every person in this territory and in this city ought to be able to expect. Basic community safety. But at recent community meetings, residents have spoken about the increasing fear, the difficulty of getting a rapid police response, and perhaps most concerning of all, people simply giving up on reporting offences because they no longer believe anything will happen.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I have sat with these residents. I have listened to their stories. The minister should have heard them at the Molonglo Valley Community Forum Community Safety Event. Mrs Morris and I recently sat down, or stood up, on a very cold evening with a group of these residents to hear their stories. Once you hear what families are actually experiencing it becomes very difficult to dismiss this as some debate about statistics or technicalities of what the government maybe meant once upon a time, because once you hear what they are actually experiencing, the stories are absolutely harrowing. One Wright resident, Aseem Bhattar, told me about teenagers trying to get into his car in his own driveway. When they could not, they jumped his neighbour's fence, opened the garage and tried to take two cars from there. They were stopped only when the dogs started barking. Two weeks later, people were back in the same street checking doors, side gates and rear entrances.

Another resident, Amelia Walton, described offenders moving through the suburb without even attempting to conceal themselves. People in this area are astounded at the brazen way in which offenders now move through their area with the express intent to commit crimes. Amelia has young children in the house and she said that knowing help could be 20 minutes away, at best, did not make her feel safe when people were trying to get into their homes late at night.

These are ordinary people living in suburbs that were supposed to be built for families. But they feel now that they have to take extraordinary actions. Parents are taking self-defence classes. We were being asked about the potential to use capsicum spray. Neighbours are creating WhatsApp groups to warn each other when someone suspicious is moving through the street. Parents are trying to convince frightened kids that it is safe to sleep in their own beds after attempted break-ins and property invasions.

Now, I ask you to put yourself in the shoes of a parent who has a five-year-old girl say, who late at night has seen someone jump the fence running from police run through the backyard to get away. I ask you to imagine the trauma that sits with that child. It does not go away quickly. That can linger for years. What has been taken from that child is

the right to feel safe in their own home. What has been taken from that family is the right to feel safe in their own home, and it takes from the community the right to believe that they are safe in their own community. This is not what people in Molonglo Valley signed up for when they decided to live there. They were sold a promise of a vibrant, safe, connected community. That is not how residents in North Wright felt when I met with them.

The stories they tell are of residents living in perpetual fear. When residents start organising their own neighbourhood warning networks because they do not believe that the official response is going to be enough, or may not get there at all, something has gone pretty badly wrong. When parents feel that they need to go and take self-defence classes or try to find out whether it is legal to purchase capsicum spray because they are worried about what might happen in their own homes and in their community, something has gone pretty badly wrong.

When people decide there is no point reporting crime because they do not think help is coming, surely that has to raise some alarm bells. When people are talking about taking matters into their own hands, the risk that someone is going to get hurt increases exponentially. That is why when Mrs Morris and I met with the community we went to great lengths to exhort them not to take matters into their own hands. It is why I have raised it personally in a face-to-face conversation with the Chief Minister.

These concerns have to be taken seriously, and it is not good enough to pretend it is not a problem because numbers are increasing. ACT Policing data shows non-motor vehicle theft in Wright reaching 79 incidents in 2025 and total recorded criminal offences reached 180 that year. That is with people losing confidence in reporting crime. It is also at the same time as we have seen decriminalisation of drug offences. But the government keeps on trying to argue that things are getting better.

I have to say the statistics that the government brought out in Molonglo Valley in no way convey the lived experience within that community. If someone is trying to get into your house being told that the territory-wide crime rate has moved in the right direction does not make your child feel any less frightened, nor does it make up for the loss of an apprentice's tools and their livelihood. If you are standing inside your home waiting twenty minutes for police, a graph does not make that wait shorter, nor does an empty promise on a Facebook post. If your street has formed a WhatsApp group because neighbours are watching out for one another at night, a ministerial talking point does not restore that confidence.

Delivering a safe community is a core responsibility of government. What promise matters if you cannot deliver on that front? If you fail on safety, basic community safety, what else really matters? All the economic opportunity in the world does not matter one bit if you do not have a safe community that protects you from someone else taking that away from you. The experience of residents, the ones they are describing, is of a rapidly growing part of Canberra that has been left waiting for the services that should have grown with it. People in Molonglo Valley feel like the government has walked away from them. They are exhausted, Mr Deputy Speaker. They are exhausted, and they are giving up on Labor ever delivering on their promises.

That does bring us to the police station. This is where the sense of betrayal in the

community becomes very real because the need for a police station in Molonglo is not new. We, on this side of the chamber, have been raising it consistently since 2019. Far before I was here, I sat down with community members and it was at the top of their list, all the way back in 2019, for the Molonglo Valley. It was formally committed to by the Liberals at the 2020 election and raised again in 2024, and in my first speech in this place I committed to continue fighting for a police station in Molonglo Valley.

Before the 2024 election Labor made its own commitment to build the Molonglo police station. It is right there on page 64 of the ACT Labor 2024 Policy Position Statement. Now that might be a bit hard to find because Labor has taken it down, but the internet archive will help you find it. It will also help you find Labor's 2024 so-called Plan for Molonglo which identified the police station as priority number one. That is what people voted on. That is what they believed they were going to get, a police station to be built in their community, not a timeline to be produced, an empty feasibility study, a plan for a plan—for a police station to be built in Molonglo Valley—and they expected it to be opened this term.

But after the election the language changed. The minister herself began describing the station no longer as something they would build but as a longer-term project connected to the future Molonglo town centre, without a delivery date. The 2025-2026 budget provided \$2.5 million for planning and analysis for future police accommodation in the Woden patrol zone and a Molonglo police station. The 2026-27 budget still describes the work as progressing planning, and I note that there are technical adjustments in that transition from last year to this.

This is what residents see; a promise before an election followed by language of vague plans after the election. It is not the only promise like that. The government can choose whatever language it likes to describe it, but residents have already chosen theirs. They feel betrayed. They feel abandoned and walked away from. The government itself describes Molonglo as one of Canberra's fastest growing regions, and it is, but the permanent local police infrastructure remains something to be planned for in the future.

This problem is not the fault of ACT Policing, quite the opposite. Our police officers do extraordinarily difficult work with the resources they are given. But the minister and this government are not only letting the community down, they are letting the police down, because there are policing challenges across Canberra, and that is precisely why the government needs to ensure police have the people, the facilities and the presence they need.

This motion asks the government to confront the practical problem in front of it. The government should be able to tell this community when construction of the police station will begin and when the doors will open. It should be funded in a budget. It was a promise. It should be delivered. That is not an unreasonable request. The promise did come from Labor after all.

The Molonglo community is, in areas, at a tipping point. When people lose confidence in the formal response, they do begin looking for alternatives. We are already seeing the first signs of that with neighbourhood groups, self-defence classes and behavioural changes. People are afraid. If that confidence keeps on deteriorating people have said they are considering taking matters into their own hands. No responsible government

should allow things to reach that point, and that is why today we are calling on the government to deliver its promise, to address the immediate concerns in the Molonglo Valley, to make sure there are patrols and a visible presence for the community to have that confidence, and to build the police station that you promised.

MRS MORRIS (Brindabella) (4.19): I rise to speak to the motion brought by Mr Cocks and myself. I thank Mr Cocks for his advocacy on this really important issue on behalf of his constituents, and I thank him for his impassioned speech where he so strongly has made the case for this motion today.

At the 2024 ACT election, ACT Labor promised the people of Murrumbidgee a Molonglo police station. But instead, Labor has delivered terror in the suburbs. Now, I know these are strong words, and I saw the gazes that were just passed by those opposite. But it is not me who is saying this, Mr Deputy Speaker. It is not Mr Cocks who is saying this. It is not even the Canberra Liberals who are saying this. This is the fear and the sentiment that has been expressed by local families, mums and dads who are terrified for their children's safety, in their own homes. Now, one of the police minister's favourite things to do is to accuse the opposition of fear-mongering any time we stand up for victims, any time we stand up for community safety, or any time we stand up for our under-resourced police who go above and beyond to keep this community safe despite the cards that they have been dealt by this government.

The Canberra Liberals have long fought for safer communities and better resourced police. And often, whenever we do that, the police minister's response has been to deride our advocacy as little more than fear-mongering. And so, I wonder what the police minister will say to these families, who are stressed beyond measure for their safety. Every house is terrified, yet there is no police patrolling and no police station. These are the words of Wright resident, Aseem Bhattar, whom Mr Cocks and I had the privilege of meeting, along with many other concerned residents.

We listened to their stories, and we could feel their emotion and their fear as they shared their experiences with us. And often these were not one-off experiences. They had been targeted multiple times. Parents told us about criminals checking that doors and gates are locked at night. Families spoke about cars being stolen and homes being broken into. Residents described sharing security footage through neighbourhood WhatsApp groups, because they are so afraid they are not only looking after their own families, they are looking after one another.

There were young mums at this meeting that Mr Cocks and I attended, and what struck me most in these young mums—they had their babies and their toddlers there with them—it hit me so hard, when these young mums who had been the victims of the home invasions, homes that were targeted, they had been told that they should take self-defence classes to protect themselves just in case help does not arrive in time. So, let that just sink in. Mothers with young children are being told, "Help may not reach you in time. It may not reach your children in time. So you need to, yourself, get self-defence classes to protect your family."

Is it any wonder that these families are terrified in their own homes, when this is the advice that they are given from authorities?

This is the fear that is in the suburbs; that families and communities will need to rise to their own defence, because even at best case, if they are prioritised, they may still be waiting 15-20 minutes for help to come. So, after decades of under-investment by this government into local policing and community safety, is this the outcome? Is this the Canberra that they have been working so dogmatically to build; a Canberra where families have to take matters into their own hands to protect themselves because our police are stretched so thin that they have to pick and choose which crimes to attend to?

Keeping this community safe is one of the most fundamental duties of government but for too many families in Molonglo, safety has been taken from them. Some residents told us they have simply stopped reporting incidents because they do not believe anything will happen. And that should concern every member of this place. When people lose confidence that reporting crime will lead to an effective response, that means we are losing trust between the community and the institutions that are there to protect them.

Our police officers are working extraordinarily hard in very, very difficult circumstances and with finite resources. They cannot be everywhere at once. They are stretched dangerously thin. And I know that it impacts their own wellbeing when they cannot be everywhere at once.

Molonglo is one of the fastest growing parts of Canberra. The government's own projections have its population growing to almost 80,000 by 2065. A fast growing region needs infrastructure that keeps pace with the people moving into it. So that does mean more police. It will mean more police. It will need a visible policing presence and infrastructure that is delivered before demand reaches crisis point. You cannot just build homes and encourage families to grow into a community, and then tell them that basic services that they rely on might, maybe, come sometime later. Good planning means anticipating growth and not scrambling to catch up with it.

Before the 2024 election, Labor promised a police station in Molonglo. The government says planning is progressing, but residents still have no timeline for when it might be delivered. And a promise without a delivery date is very little comfort to families who are checking their security cameras before going to bed, every single night.

This is why this motion is so important. It calls for stronger, visible police presence in Molonglo. This is needed now. The people of Molonglo need to see a real and immediate response to their real and immediate concerns. They need a deterrent to brazen criminals—criminals who know the weakness of this government, and they exploit it at every opportunity they get.

But this is not enough to deal with the underlying problems of crime in the long road, which will only grow as the population of the Molonglo increases and the Molonglo town centre is delivered. This motion therefore, calls on the government to progress the station it has promised. We need a clear and public timeline so that people of Molonglo know when that promise will become a reality, or if this is just simply one more broken Labor promise.

Mr Speaker, residents should not have to organise their lives around the fear of crime. Children should not be frightened to sleep in their own beds, and parents should not

feel that they are on their own if somebody comes through that door, uninvited. The community has raised their concerns clearly. The government has made a commitment. And what residents now need is certainty about when it will be delivered. I thank Mr Cocks for his advocacy for his constituents, and I commend this motion to the Assembly.

DR PATERSON (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services, and Minister for Gaming Reform) (4.29): I thank Mr Cocks and Mrs Morris for bringing this motion to the Assembly. The ACT government is strongly committed to community safety in Molonglo Valley. I provided an update on a motion to the Assembly in October 2025, regarding the progress of the police station, so it is great to be able to provide another update today.

The response outlined that Canberra Infrastructure has developed a draft project plan, terms of reference and scope, and supported an initial stakeholder engagement. The first steering group meeting occurred on 17 September last year.

Infrastructure Canberra is undertaking a detailed needs and scope analysis for police accommodation in the Woden patrol zone and the Molonglo Valley police station. This work includes resourcing, budgeting and scoping arrangements, and the output will guide future government investment decisions.

The government acknowledges that residents of Wright, Coombs, Denman Prospect, Whitlam and the broader Molonglo region want assurance that policing resources and community infrastructure are keeping pace with that growth. Community safety is, and will remain, a core priority of this government.

The motion refers to concerns raised by residents regarding crime, police responsiveness and the delivery of a future police station in Molonglo. These are matters of priority for the government and I welcome the opportunity to provide the Assembly with some important context and updates.

Firstly, it is important that discussions about community safety are informed by evidence. ACT Policing advises that 665 offences were reported across the Molonglo district during 25-26, compared with 594 offences in the previous year; so, an increase of approximately 12 per cent, or 71 offences.

However, this increase should be considered in the context of the Molonglo Valley's continued residential development and significant population growth. The Molonglo Valley remains one of the fastest-growing areas in Canberra, with substantial growth occurring across all suburbs including Whitlam, Denman Prospect and Coombs. The number of households and residents in the district has increased significantly over recent years, resulting in increased demand across all government services.

Importantly, several key property crime categories declined over the same period. Burglaries decreased by approximately 32 per cent, stolen motor vehicles decreased by approximately 13 per cent, theft offences decreased by approximately 5 per cent, and other property offences decreased by 50 per cent.

While total offences increased by 71 incidents, major property crime categories including burglary, stolen motor vehicle, theft (excluding a motor vehicle) and other offences against property collectively fell by 11 per cent.

Offences against the person increased from 86 to 109 offences, and traffic offences increased from 108 to 176 offences. When we were at the community forum that I will talk about, ACT Policing very specifically stated that the increase in road offences is because of the increased patrols and the increased public reporting through the online portal, as well. So ACT police are out and about in Molonglo Valley.

At the same time, the government and ACT Policing recognises that individual incidents can have a significant impact on victims and on broader perceptions of community safety. Every incident matters, and every resident deserves to feel safe in their home and neighbourhood.

The ACT government has resourced ACT Policing to operate an intelligence-led deployment model that focuses resources where they are most needed. Officers are not deployed solely according to the location of police stations. They routinely operate through patrol zones and across district boundaries, where operationally required.

Police activity is informed by crime trends, intelligence holdings, emerging risks and calls for service. This approach ensures that police resources can be directed to areas of greatest need rather than being restricted by geographic station boundaries. ACT Policing continues to monitor crime patterns and community concerns across the Molonglo Valley, and can adjust patrol activity where hotspots or emerging issues are identified.

The government is committed to ongoing engagement with the Molonglo community through community forums and other local engagement opportunities. These forums provide an important avenue for residents to raise issues, understand policing priorities and receive updates on future infrastructure planning.

On 25 July, I attended the Molonglo Valley community forum alongside the Chief Police Officer of the ACT. At this forum, I heard from concerns from residents—and since then, I have undertaken to continue to engage with the community alongside the Chief Police Officer through an additional public forum before the end of the year. The government will continue to listen to the Molonglo Valley as it grows, and to work with ACT Policing and local stakeholders to ensure community views are taken into account in planning and service delivery.

I want to clearly address the government's commitments regarding policing infrastructure. The government remains committed to delivering a policing facility that supports the growing Molonglo community. The government has invested \$2.5 million across last year and this year to progress planning for police accommodation that will support both Molonglo Valley and Woden. This funding is supporting industry consultation, detailed needs analysis and scope-of-development work.

The recently published Molonglo town centre master plan identifies a site for a future Molonglo police station. This planning work is progressing. Infrastructure Canberra is working across government with the Justice and Community Safety Directorate, ACT

Policing and the Suburban Land Agency to ensure that all planning considerations are met.

A report on planning considerations for the future police station is expected later this year and will inform further government consideration of the project. As planning progresses, key stakeholders including ACT Policing and the Justice and Community Safety Directorate will continue to be engaged to assist in defining the scope and operational requirements of the future facility. This work is essential to ensure that any future facility is fit for purpose, supports contemporary policing models and represents an effective investment of public funds.

The Molonglo police station is expected progress to the approvals stage in late 2027. Subject to statutory approvals, this process is expected to take approximately 12 to 18 months. A detailed delivery timing will be able to be confirmed as these approvals progress.

In the meantime, planning work is also examining the capacity and refurbishment requirements of Woden police station, to ensure policing services continue to meet the needs of both existing communities.

Delivering major public infrastructure requires careful planning, detailed analysis and responsible investment decisions. The government will continue to progress this work in partnership with ACT Policing, Infrastructure Canberra and the Molonglo community.

The government continues to roll out over \$100 million to increase police funding to see more police in the ACT. We will continue to support that ACT Policing members do every day. We recognise the importance of visible policing, and we recognise the importance of ensuring that infrastructure keeps pace with the growth across our city.

The government remains committed to working with ACT Policing, Infrastructure Canberra and the local community to ensure residents of the Molonglo Valley continue to receive effective policing services—now and into the future. It is for those reasons that I will move the amendments to reflect the work underway and the practical steps being taken to deliver long-term policing infrastructure for the region.

I move:

Dr Paterson (Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services) moved the following amendment: Omit all text in paragraph (3), substitute:

“(3) calls on the ACT Government to report back to the Assembly by the first sitting week of 2027 on:

- (a) data on crime trends for the Molonglo Valley in comparison to the rest of the ACT over the last two quarters of 2026;
- (b) an update on the progress of a police station for the Molonglo Valley, including timelines on identified infrastructure needs and a needs and scope analysis; and
- (c) further engagement with the Molonglo Valley community at public forums.”.

MS VASSAROTTI (Kurrajong) (4.38): I rise to speak to both the motion and the amendment. We have had this debate about crime, police resources and community safety several times before in the Assembly. The Greens' position is that it is important that we have engaged, responsive and effective police services. We want to emphasise community policing models that see our police working to support community cohesion and safety, where police are a trusted part of the community and most often work to create a sense of safety rather than respond to increased crime rates.

The allocation and distribution of police services need to be made fairly based on evidence and need. People in the Molonglo Valley, as well as in other parts of Canberra, are worried about their safety and about crime in their neighbourhood. These are genuine concerns for people. Crime is increasing in the valley as the population increases. That is self-evident. It is a fast growing area. Whether crime is increasing disproportionately on a per capita basis is a different question, and this is not supported by the evidence.

Of course, no-one wants to feel unsafe in their community, and people want an efficient and effective response to crime or threats of crime. People in the Molonglo Valley are concerned about break-ins and attempted break-ins. Their security footage of the intruders prowling around their homes is frightening, and I have heard similar reports and concerns from other parts of Canberra, not just Molonglo.

The Molonglo Valley needs and deserves a police station. The government has committed to building one. This was a prominent promise at the last election. What is not clear is the timeline. Of course, infrastructure takes time to plan and build, and the new police station will form part of the Molonglo town centre. However, I think it is implicit in election commitments—or at least a lot of residents who are not closely involved in the intricacies of town planning will interpret it in this way—that an election announcement means the facility will be built in the next term of government.

It is a bit disingenuous to promise at the 2024 election that Labor will build a new police station as well as other infrastructure for Molonglo when what is not said is that it will be built at some distant future date. When is that date? 2030? Later? We actually do not know. This is, in fact, a problematic pattern with Labor election commitments and we need to call this out. These promises are announced at elections in a flurry of fanfare only to not actually arrive in any reasonable timeframe—for example, the duplication of Athllon Drive, whose certainty was cemented in the public's mind via roadsides announcing: "We are duplicating this road."

What about the triumphantly-announced mountain bike trails from Stromlo to Cotter, which have now been trumpeted at two elections and there is still no sign of them. I spoke to a mountain biker recently who started as young, bright-eyed and keen to ride on these promised trails. Now, with the passing years, he is too old to even ride a mountain bike anymore. He said he fondly remembers the promise of the trails and hopes that a new generation might one day ride on those fabled trails. It is only two years to the next election. Imagine if some of those promises were recycled a third time. No wonder people are cynical and do not believe what politicians say.

So it would be good and reasonable to provide the community with some kind of

indicative timeframe for the delivery of the Molonglo police station. Part of the issue is that residents feel they are in the dark. I look forward to the minister providing this updated information on the first sitting of next year, which is when she has committed through her amendment to report back to the Assembly. One might expect the government to be able to provide a timeline sooner. It is unusual that we cannot provide a date, especially when it is an election commitment, but I understand there are complexities with the timing of a town centre and planning to go through. Still, the government does need to provide more information to the community than it is currently. The Greens expect to see the clear delivery timetable when the government reports back.

One of the positive things about Canberra is that it is generally a very safe community with low crime rates. It is comparatively the safest jurisdiction in Australia. Not only that; crime is decreasing in Canberra. Interestingly, what has been increasing is people's perceptions of crime. People in the ACT, as well as in the rest of Australia, believe that crime is increasing when, in fact, it is not. This is not to discount the real concerns that people have, but, as always, in discussions about our approach to complex questions of policy and resource allocation, it is important to be accurate about the underlying facts.

This motion is one that calls for increased resources in the sponsoring member's electorate. It brings up the common issue of how to prioritise resources when there is a limited pie. There is, of course, a whole range of issues that ACT Policing needs to respond to right across the Canberra community. Police do their best to allocate these limited resources based on need and they use operational evidence and a system of triaging.

Members from one electorate will sometimes ask that policing services are increased and prioritised in their own electorate, as Mr Cocks is doing in this motion, but unfortunately, because there is no magic pudding to accommodate this increase, services may need to be correspondingly reduced in another electorate. For instance, Mr Cain has been petitioning for increased police presence in Belconnen, and perhaps for Mr Cain that increase will not occur in Belconnen because, instead, the Canberra Liberals have decided, through this motion, that a slice of police resourcing should go to the Molonglo Valley instead.

Sometimes the request is for everything, everywhere, all at once, just like in the movies, but unfortunately the reality is that decisions need to be taken about when and where to allocate limited resources. In this case, we recognise that ACT Policing has the best information to decide how to do that. I note also that it is not always clear that increased visible police presence will reduce crime or solve complex criminal problems. The PACER model also shows, for example, that responding to some incidents with mental health expertise results in far better and safer outcomes for everyone. Building community connections is important, and that is one of the reasons we will be supporting the government amendment.

I would like to further elaborate on the Greens' approach to the issues of crime and community safety, because we have been long concerned—as have many who work in the justice space—that political discussions often reduce community safety debates to a narrow frame that ignores evidence based solutions, often with damaging consequences. The Greens' position encompasses a bigger picture and acknowledges

that police response is only one part of addressing crime. It is not an effective or sustainable long-term approach for the government to continually invest more and more into police and expect that alone will reduce crime rates.

The Greens' position is that community wellbeing and the genuine prevention of crime is best addressed by tackling the social determinants of crime. This is a justice re-investment approach. The justice re-investment approach invests in community and in addressing factors like disadvantage, insecure housing and mental health, all which reduce crime at its root causes. It includes re-integration and rehabilitation of offenders, which is significant given we know the considerable proportion of offences that are committed by recidivist offenders.

It is also important to build a sense of safety and community wellbeing by investing in community infrastructure and support. I have asked the minister to ensure that she and ACT Policing engage with the Molonglo community, and I am pleased to see that the government amendment reflects that. I believe that the community will appreciate that. A feeling of neglect can be alleviated by policing meeting with and providing information about the approach they are taking and the work they are doing in the Molonglo Valley.

The Greens will support the government's amendment. The government needs to provide the community with a clear timeline for delivering the police station in Molonglo. We expect the update at the start of next year to be comprehensive. We do not see it particularly helpful to just call for it to be urgently delivered. It is also reasonable to allow ACT Policing the operational flexibility to use the resources in the smartest way across all of Canberra rather than dictate from the Assembly that police will send their resources to particular electorates. And we support a new call that requires further government engagement in Molonglo. As I said, I am assured that this will include police engagement with the community. I commend the motion and amendment to the Assembly.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (4.48): I am going to speak very briefly on this motion. I thank Mr Cocks and Mrs Morris for bringing it forward today. The intent of the motion is clear, and we know our police force is stretched thin. We learned from a question during annual reports hearings last year that an average of 39 ACT Policing members work overtime every day. We also know that the Molonglo police station was one of ACT Labor's election commitments, so I appreciate the doggedness of the Canberra Liberals in working to ensure this commitment is delivered for the residents of Molonglo Valley within this term of government. In an update to the Assembly in October last year, we heard that a draft project plan had already been developed, yet we have heard relatively little further news since then, so I am sympathetic to these concerns and supportive of the intent of the motion.

I am also sympathetic to concerns that interference from the Assembly with a too-direct call in the operational decisions and distribution of ACT Policing resources across the territory may set a risky precedent. Such decisions, of course, should be informed by point-in-time demand and risk, and ultimately determined by those with the expert operational knowledge within ACT Policing. In this respect, I think Ms Carrick's proposed amendment, which we will deal with later, strikes the right balance, to make clear what the Assembly wants to occur without directing exactly how that should

occur.

I am also somewhat self-interestedly concerned that embedding too tight a deadline within this motion might derail or at least delay the urgently needed work on a city police station. Hopefully these things can happen concurrently. I note that it is something that is frequently raised with me by constituents. The city police station continues to operate in an extraordinarily poor condition. We have all seen the reports of sewerage running down the walls, significant water leaks when it rains, and broader unhygienic contamination to the station. This is obviously a real priority for the union and for our dedicated police officers and staff, and it needs to be prioritised.

With that said, we need clear timelines as well. Members of the Molonglo Valley community deserve clarity regarding this commitment. The amendments brought forward by Dr Paterson and that Ms Carrick has circulated strike the right balance to address different concerns while ensuring there is increased accountability to the government in delivery of its election commitment.

I thank the opposition again for raising these issues in the Assembly today. I am supportive of the motion, subject to the amendments that have been circulated by Dr Paterson and Ms Carrick.

MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi) (4.51): I have just a short contribution on this one. I absolutely agree that crime is an issue in Molonglo Valley. My heart really goes out to people who have moved to Coombs and Wright and hoped that it would be a safe place for them to live and raise a family, but I would like to note, like others have, that this is not limited to just this part of Canberra.

I have been door-knocking a lot recently over our winter break. In Amaroo in particular, clearly a lot of residents are deeply concerned about crime, including youth crime. Similarly, the residents of Harrison and Franklin are concerned about burglaries and car theft. Residents of Taylor are concerned about assaults. There was an issue at Mum's house in Giralang. So there are concerns across my whole electorate. People are generally worried about carjacking, assaults, property damage and other issues in the Gungahlin town centre. I do not know whether anyone saw that. Liquorland Amaroo was robbed in a really similar fashion to that in Red Hill, and these things are happening daily. These concerns have led me to ask the minister to increase police presence around Yerrabi in order to deter crime and re-assure local residents about their safety and ensure rapid responses when crime is reported.

I have also asked the minister to provide more information about police response times as this data is only reported periodically through the Productivity Commission. I believe it should be provided to the Assembly so we can hold the government accountable for their performance on crime and safety. Those are questions I have put on notice. I understand we will get that information. So, while I support the motion, I want to re-iterate that the problem is not limited to Molonglo, and a step change in police visibility and reporting is long overdue.

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (4.53): I will speak to the amendment. What did I say about talking points and the use of statistics? The minister has just stood here and again trotted out a bunch of statistics that simply do not reflect a lived experience or

acknowledge the lived experience of the people deeply impacted by crime in their community. To use broad statistics when we are dealing with problems of violent crime, break-ins and property invasions is an astounding dismissal. The minister stood here and seemed to argue that a police station was not that important because there are police presences through other mechanisms. If the minister listened to the stories that the community conveyed, fundamentally, one of the problems is that the police presence is not reaching people in the community. What is more, I think it is a very short-sighted and constrained view of what a police station is, if all it is is a base for the police to expand their operations. A police station is a visible sign to the community that there are police in the area and a police station is somewhere for people to turn when they need help.

The Greens have stood here, and their big contribution seems to have been to support the dismissiveness of the minister and to ask the minister to do things that the minister is already doing. The detail of this amendment is a classic old trick that Labor and Green governments brought out in previous years, which is to amend things to call on themselves to do things that they are already doing.

I want to go to a couple of the specifics that have been brought up. The minister tried to suggest—and the Greens factor in—that they needed to do the planning properly—you have got to do the planning process properly; you have to plan these things before they can be delivered. Well, in 2003 the idea was on the table for Molonglo Valley and in 2004 the Canberra Spatial Plan was being worked on—indeed, it was released. In 2005-06 we had urban form planning; in 2008, the Territory Planning Framework; and in May 2010, the Molonglo Valley Structure Plan. Labor has had more than 20 years of planning to get this right. You cannot pretend that this is a problem that has emerged with no warning. You cannot pretend that you did not have some time.

The Greens have also levelled some criticisms that this is about new spending. Actually, this is about delivering on an election promise. I believe the Chief Minister stood in this place, or possibly in a committee hearing, and said that the Labor Party are going to deliver on all of their election promises and that they would all be funded through the upcoming budget. So this is not new spending; this is spending that Labor have said that they are already going to do. It just does not happen to appear in this year's budget papers—like a whole bunch of Labor's promises. This is something that the government promised. It should not be dismissed. It should not be trivialised in this way.

I think it is very important if we just understand for a minute exactly what Labor's amendment to this motion remove. Labor's amendment removes the call to immediately increase visible police patrols in the Molonglo Valley; they remove the call to urgently deliver the Molonglo Valley Police Station; and they remove the call to publish a delivery timetable—three tangible steps. They do not even go as far as saying exactly when the government has to do it, but the government will actually remove a call to deliver a police station for Molonglo Valley. That is the step that they are taking in moving this amendment. A member for Murrumbidgee and Minister for Police will stand in this place and say, "Actually, it's not that important in this Assembly to be calling for Labor to deliver on its election promises and give people in Molonglo Valley a police station"—the police station that the community has been asking for; the police station they should have known was required; the police station that is a really important part of the infrastructure that keeps the community safe.

So there is no possible way that the Canberra Liberals can support this amendment. If the government were being upfront about things, if they did not like this motion, if they did not want to support a call to deliver a police station as they promised before an election, they should have had the guts to just oppose it, not just underhandedly shift what the “calls on” are at the last moment in a debate. The minister did not engage with us. There was no negotiation around this motion. These are all tactics from a party that has been in government for too long, and it demonstrates clearly why so many people are giving up on Labor.

Question put:

That the amendment be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 13

Noes 8

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

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Dr Paterson’s amendment agreed to.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (5.04): I move the following amendment to the motion, as amended:

Add:

“(3)(d) work with ACT Policing to ensure an appropriate visible police presence and patrols in Wright, Coombs, Denman Prospect, Whitlam, Uriarra and surrounding Molonglo Valley suburbs while planning for the Molonglo Valley Police Station continues; and

(4) finalise the land subdivision for the police station and release to market by the end of 2027.”

This amendment asks the government to work with ACT Policing to ensure there is an appropriate visible police presence and patrols in Molonglo and Uriarra. People have a right to feel safe in their homes and in their community. Over recent months I have heard increasing concerns from Molonglo residents about theft, break-ins and how long it can take for police to respond. Recent ACT Policing data reported in the *Canberra Times* shows that Wright recorded 180 criminal offences in 2025—the highest annual number recorded for the suburb—including 79 non-motor vehicle thefts. Across Molonglo, recorded offences reached 608 in 2025, an increase driven largely by theft.

But the statistics only tell us part of the story. Residents have said that, when they report

an incident, they want confidence that someone will respond. If people begin to believe that there is little point in reporting crime, that damages trust and also makes it harder to understand what is actually happening in the community. That is why visible policing matters. A police station in Molonglo is important. I support delivering the government's commitment, but residents need support now, while that station is being planned. At present, Molonglo is serviced through the Woden patrol zone, which covers a very large part of Canberra. ACT Policing can deploy officers across patrol zones and dispatch the nearest available resources, and we would like to see those arrangements used as effectively as possible to provide a stronger visible police presence in Molonglo. Residents should see police in their neighbourhoods and have confidence that, when they need assistance, police will respond.

The government committed, in the 2024 election, to a new Molonglo police station. There is some funding for planning in the budget, but we still do not have a clear construction timetable and opening date. As I have said before, Molonglo has grown quickly and, too often, essential infrastructure has been left to catch up. The police station should not become another example. The community deserves clarity about the next steps, when the site will be confirmed, when construction will be funded and when the station is expected to open.

My amendment seeks to keep the process to deliver the police station going. It calls on the government to finalise the land subdivision in the Molonglo town centre for the police station and release the block to market or issue a tender for construction by the end of 2027. Most importantly, residents deserve to feel safe in their own homes and confident that their concerns are being heard.

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (5.07): The Canberra Liberals will be supporting this amendment, because it makes the government's amendment slightly less bad. I note that it essentially restores some of the elements that were already there around visible police presence. So it is a bit strange to me if the government—as I understand it may—supports this amendment but was not willing to have that appear in the original motion.

I also acknowledge the expansion that Ms Carrick has brought with this amendment to areas such as Uriarra. I was out at Uriarra recently and crime is absolutely one of the top concerns out at Uriarra Village. The hooning that they have to contend with, the inability to get home at night and the impact on their basic infrastructure are absolutely extreme. While the original intent of this motion was Molonglo Valley, I am very happy to include the surrounding areas, such as Uriarra, in this through this amendment.

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

Ms Carrick's amendment agreed to.

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (5.09): Very briefly and in closing, I thank the Independent members who were willing to support the motion as originally presented, because it is important that we make sure Canberrans can actually feel safe in their community. It is that simple. This is a pretty straightforward motion that calls on the government to do what it had already said it was going to do. It is astounding to me that a minister for police, who also is a local member for this area, could not bring

themselves to support a motion that simply wanted the government to deliver on its promise.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Papers

Motion to take note of papers

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

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

Appropriation Bill 2026-2027

[Cognate bill: Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill 2026-2027]

Detail stage

Schedule 1—Appropriations—Proposed expenditure.

City and Environment Directorate—Part 1.4

Debate resumed.

MS CHEYNE (Ginninderra—Manager of Government Business, Attorney-General, Minister for City and Government Services, and Minister for Transport) (5.11): I am pleased to speak about this component of this year's budget and the investments it makes in the services Canberrans rely on every day. I begin by acknowledging the people who deliver those services: our City Services crews, bus drivers, Access Canberra staff, transport officers, water cultural teams, road and stormwater crews, and the many people whose work is often most visible only when something goes wrong. Canberra works because they do. I acknowledge that, in this very moment, there are first responders, including Roads ACT first responders, at what seems to be a horrific scene in the north of Canberra. It is not lost on me that we are talking about these crews, these people who care for our city in every practical way possible, while they are quite literally out there assisting our emergency services. I sincerely thank them.

This budget is about practical delivery. It is about maintaining essential services, improving reliability, investing in the infrastructure of growing city needs, and making choices that are sustainable over time. That last point really matters. There has been a great deal of debate in this chamber recently about public services, accountability and difficult decisions. I do not intend to rerun last week's debates today, but I do want to be clear about the standard that I apply to the decisions in my portfolios. Services should be reliable, safe, accessible, responsive to demand without being reactive to individual demands, and capable of being sustained by the workforce and the budget available to deliver them. It is not an argument that every service we have is perfect or that every decision will be popular, but it is an argument for governing on the basis of evidence, being candid about constraints, and fixing problems when they arise.

This is a budget that provides more than \$65 million in targeted investment to support

public green spaces, improve suburban amenity and strengthen frontline city services. I heard suggested earlier that the sum total of rates revenue is now less than the interest on territory debt and that this somehow proves there is no money to maintain the community. The fiscal pressure from debt and interest is real and is exactly why sustainable budgeting matters. Notwithstanding that some members in this place approach accurate arithmetic as optional, the conclusion does not follow from the premise. This budget is making new targeted investments in frontline city services and local infrastructure rather than abandoning them.

From this budget, Canberrans will see upgrades at shopping precincts in Chisholm, Cooleman Court, Kingston and Kippax—upgrades that we are seeking the community's input on right now. These are works which will improve accessibility, pavement, landscaping, seating and public amenities. We are also delivering new public toilet facilities at Umbagog Park to complement the playground upgrade that is underway. These are not abstract investments; they are the paths people walk on, the local centres that people use, the public spaces that families spend time in, and the basic infrastructure that shapes how a neighbourhood feels and functions.

We are also providing ongoing funding for our mowing and horticultural crews. Seasonal conditions are changing and so our response has to change with them. The budget supports the workforce needed to maintain parks, open spaces and streetscapes to respond more effectively when growth conditions put additional pressure on them. This does not mean doing what we have always done and just adding more resources to it; it means we have to look at how we are responding across the city, take into account all of the evidence and all of the changes in front of us, and be sensible about our resources.

With that in mind, we are providing additional support for our volunteer coordinators in urban parks and for temporary traffic management teams. These are investments that support community organisations that help care for Canberra, as well as the workers who keep our roadside work sites safe. We are investing in critical stormwater infrastructure, including upgrades in Hall Village, which I know are sorely welcome, and planning for future improvements at Knowles Place and condition audits across the ACT stormwater network. These projects are not always highly visible, but they are fundamental to a resilient city. Goodness knows that, if something goes wrong, it really goes wrong. We are also upgrading the ageing fire hydrant network at the Mugga Lane Resource Management Centre, and we are procuring a new traffic and parking enforcement solution to replace ageing technology and infrastructure.

I acknowledge the frustration about the time that it has taken to replace Canberra's materials recovery facility and the subsequent impacts on FOGO. However, no matter how many times we explain it, whether it is here, in estimates or annual reports hearings, publicly or privately, members deliberately insist on a different narrative. The previous materials recovery facility was destroyed by fire in December 2022. That meant all of the timelines and implementation for other projects were off the table. It meant we had to relook at everything anew. Veolia was appointed in January 2025 to design, build and operate the replacement. The demolition of the damaged facility was completed in November last year. The environmental impact assessment process has been completed and the DA has been lodged. Construction is expected to commence soon and the new facility will be operational in 2028.

That is later than we originally envisaged. There is no value in pretending otherwise. But a deadline is not a delivery plan. Recycling services have continued in the interim and a major industrial facility of this kind still has to go through proper procurement, environmental planning and construction processes. We are now at a point with FOGO where procurement is underway. Again, we had to stage these processes in a sensible order, and I think that the community would back the approach that we have taken, as much as members in this place may protest.

Mr Cain has pointed to 460 streetlight faults that have been outstanding for more than 90 days. It is a real backlog, and I do not dismiss the frustration that it causes residents, but it is important to understand what sits behind those long-running cases. Routine faults, such as globes and resets, are generally repaired within five business days—often much quicker. The longer-running faults are commonly complex underground cable problems requiring fault location, excavation, electrical works and, in some cases, specialist underboring. Demand for those civil works has been particularly constrained by the NBN rollout and the other major infrastructure projects. Safety-critical repairs are prioritised, long-term cable faults are published and updated, and we are working with the maintenance contractor to source additional providers. The answer to a backlog is to work it down, not to pretend that every outstanding job is the same kind of repair.

One theme running through all of this is reliability. A service is not genuinely accessible if people cannot depend on it being available when it is supposed to be. That principle has been central to the work we have undertaken in Libraries ACT. Members are entitled to disagree with the changes to library hours, and I have never suggested otherwise, but it is important to describe the decision accurately. All nine ACT public library branches remain open. The government is committed to evaluating the new operating arrangements and publishing that evaluation by March 2027, and to prioritising the restoration of weekend branch access at Kippax and Erindale from July next year. Those commitments provide a clear basis for measuring whether the new model is delivering what it is intended to. The budget also supports continued high-quality service delivery through Access Canberra and progresses the refurbishment of Woden Library to incorporate the existing Access Canberra service centre. It will make it easier for residents to access government services in one location.

We are continuing ongoing funding for companion animal care support, to support our community organisations in providing veterinary treatment, desexing, adoption and rehoming services. It is a relatively modest program but has very practical benefits for animals and the people who care for them. I am particularly grateful to our partners across those organisations, and especially ARF, ACT Rescue and Foster, who do so much work in partnership with Domestic Animal Services. We are truly indebted to them.

Since the budget was first brought down, I have also taken on the transport portfolio. I want to address those investments directly. It is one of the clearest examples of why governments have to plan for both the immediate service and the long-term city. People need buses and light rail that work today, while we also have to build the infrastructure needed for Canberra's growth over decades. The budget progresses planning and design for the Belconnen to City Transitway, which is a corridor that is critical to improving connections between major employment, education and health precincts, and supports

future growth in the north and west of the city. We are also progressing detailed design and construction of a new active travel connection between Hall Village and Gold Creek, giving people a safer and more direct option to walk and cycle.

On public transport operations, the budget funds workforce obligations, light rail commitments and increasing operating costs. We are continuing recruitment of bus drivers, including a very successful campaign in August, and we are strengthening our transit enforcement and transport officer workforce to support reliability, customer service and network safety. We are maintaining transit enforcement officers, expanding de-escalation training and continuing the rollout of safety screens for bus drivers—practical measures for both staff and passengers. The transition to a zero-emissions public transport fleet also continues. There are 106 battery-electric buses already operating across the network, and procurement is progressing for a further 30 as part of the broader rollout of 110 new electric buses over four years.

To conclude this, I need to point out that members are going to have different views about individual spending choices. That is the nature of our budget debate and it is entirely legitimate, but the budget before us should be judged on what it funds and what it delivers. It funds local shopping centre upgrades; it funds mowing and horticultural capacity; it funds stormwater work, safer roadside operations and modern enforcement systems; it funds public transport operations, driver recruitment and network safety; it progresses the Belconnen to City Transitway, active travel infrastructure and the zero-emissions bus fleet; it supports Access Canberra, companion animal welfare and the day-to-day services that keep this city functioning—practical investments, not in the abstract. They are practical investments in the ordinary things that matter enormously when people use them every day. That work will not stop because a debate is difficult. The inconvenient thing about government is that eventually someone has to make the thing work. Where a service needs improvement, we will do it; where a system is struggling, we will fix it; and, where a decision has to balance competing demands, I will explain the basis for it and be accountable for it. The public deserves decisions that survive beyond the applause line or the social media grab.

Taken together, these are initiatives that support a city to be more connected, more resilient, safer and better prepared for the future. I commend this component of the budget to the chamber.

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage, and Minister for Sport and Recreation) (5.24): I rise today to speak in support of the 2026-27 budget across the planning and sustainable development portfolio. These initiatives complement the ACT government's broader commitment to enable 30,000 new homes by 2030 and the priorities that I have outlined in the Statement of Planning Priorities to ensure that Canberra's growth is well-planned, connected and sustainable.

A key focus of the budget is supporting the delivery of missing middle housing across our established suburbs in Canberra. To support this, the government is investing over two years to deliver a Canberra House Pattern Book, delivering on our election commitment, and has commenced a review of the lease variation charge framework. This includes funding for a design competition and the development of a Canberra House Pattern Book with pre-approved, architect-designed missing middle homes,

which may include terraces, townhouses, and dual occupancies, making it easier to deliver well-designed medium-density housing across our city. These designs will help to reduce the cost and complexity of delivering new housing, streamline approvals and provide greater certainty for industry, while ensuring development complements the character of Canberra's suburbs.

From 1 July 2026, the government introduced, through funding in the budget, a time-limited 50 per cent reduction in the lease variation charge for eligible missing middle developments in RZ1 and RZ2 residential zones. This reduction will further support feasibility of development of missing middle housing. The measure will apply until June 2029, supporting timely delivery aligned with the 2030 housing target while the government undertakes a broader review of the lease variation charge.

The budget also includes previously provisioned funding to support the strategic planning and enabling work required to enable 30,000 homes by 2030. A key program of this work is about unlocking housing opportunities around local and group centres and along major transport corridors, through what is known as transit-oriented development and shop adjacent and shop-top housing. This includes advancing transit-oriented development in the Southern Gateway and the City and Gateway, and work is underway to prepare an aligned uplift along the light rail and high-frequency rapid bus corridors. The work funded also includes enabling mid-rise housing in well-located areas, progressing the next phase of missing middle housing reforms.

This work is supported by improved planning tools, including a mixed-use compatibility framework to manage amenity and interface to improve efficiency and reduce development barriers, and at the same time we are strengthening the evidence base that underpins planning decisions through feasibility testing for mid-rise housing, retail and catchment analysis to guide centre redevelopment, and the development of frameworks that provide more transparent, consistent planning outcomes. Central to this work is the Planning Strategy refresh, with an integrated planning and transport strategy. This will set up the long-term spatial vision for Canberra, bringing together land use planning and transport planning to guide future amendments to the Territory Plan, precinct planning and infrastructure investment in a coordinated way. The integrated strategy will ensure that housing growth is aligned with transport corridors, centres and infrastructure, supporting a more compact, connected and efficient city over the long-term as an alternative to urban sprawl. This work will also support the establishment of an urban growth boundary for the ACT.

Funding will also support infrastructure capacity and servicing assessments across both greenfield and established areas, identifying constraints, sequencing development and ensuring land can be brought to the market efficiently. Complementing planning for social infrastructure, including schools, health services and community recreation facilities, will ensure that growth is supported by the services and infrastructure needed to maintain our great quality of life, which has been recognised in the last week, for the second year running, as being the best in the world.

We are continuing the work to progress community facility land releases that align with community needs, and are investigating opportunities for more community organisations to find land to develop facilities, ensuring provision for social, cultural and community uses across Canberra. Targeted technical studies and Territory Plan

amendments will also help to de-risk development opportunities around key sites and centres, supporting timely redevelopment and renewal and stronger investment confidence.

As we enable more housing, the government is also strengthening building quality, because consumer confidence is critical for housing supply. We are continuing work on extending occupational licensing for selected building trades to support high standards of skills, qualifications and accountability across the construction sector. We are also continuing the work to rollout the property developers licensing scheme from 1 October. I am looking forward to speaking about that further in the sitting week.

The initiatives in my portfolios in the 2026-27 budget represent a significant investment in housing but also a coordinated and practical approach to supporting not just more housing but also industry, as well as strengthening Canberra's planning system. They are designed to unlock supply in well-located areas, reduce barriers to delivery, and ensure that growth is aligned with infrastructure and community needs. Through this work, the government continues to build a more liveable, connected, sustainable and resilient Canberra. I commend this part of the budget to the Assembly.

Proposed expenditure agreed to.

Justice and Community Safety Directorate—Part 1.5

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (5.31): I am speaking today about the government funding for the horseracing industry. I move amendment No 2 circulated in my name and table a supplementary explanatory statement to the amendment [*see schedule 1 at page 2988*]. Since this special funding arrangement began, the ACT government has given over \$100 million to the horseracing industry. This year's budget provides an \$8.7 million handout to the horseracing industry. Ending this multimillion-dollar handout should be an easy decision, particularly after we have had both the fiscal committee and the Saul Eslake report, which found that the ACT budget is unsustainable. The Labor government has been spending more money than it has raised in revenue, yet the Labor government is making decisions like this to keep funding the horseracing industry while cutting services. This is not about whether the horseracing industry has the right to exist; it is about whether the industry should only continue to exist by being funded by public money to the tune of \$8.7 million per year. They are nearly half-funded by the ACT government.

The Independent Competition and Regulatory Commission looked at this issue back in 2011 after the sale of the TAB. The ICRC said at the time that, if the government gave this industry public funding—if, not when—it should be for a short time only while they bridged to an independent model. That was 15 years ago. A decade and a half later, the horseracing industry continues to receive extraordinarily generous public funding. That funding is secure and guaranteed over multiple years. Labor has also refused to publicly commit whether this funding will continue beyond the current special deal, which expires next year. If Labor renews this special deal, that will probably mean another \$40 million or \$50 million of ACT taxpayer money flowing to the horseracing industry, funding that could otherwise be invested in the environment, the community services, the arts or grassroots sport.

How much is \$8.7 million for the ACT government? It is quite a lot. We do not have a big budget. In previous budgets, the Labor government cut the Rent Relief Fund of \$1.7 million. That Rent Relief Fund kept almost 1,700 people in their homes. The ACT Labor government spends over \$40,000 per person per year to keep a Canberran homeless. That is just direct costs in terms of health and other expenses that government incurs. It does not count lost productivity. It does not put any price on the human misery caused by homelessness. It is just the government's direct cost of homelessness. So cutting a relatively modest fund that prevented people from becoming homeless was not only extraordinarily cruel; it was fiscally short-sighted. After enormous public pressure, Labor agreed to restore that funding through the Housing Crisis Support Fund. You cannot yet apply for that fund. If you need crisis funding right now, just wait—unless, of course, you are in the horseracing industry, in which case you will get your secure funding locked in. This says a lot about the Labor government's priorities. While renters and people facing homelessness are left waiting for assistance, the horseracing industry is offered certainty and guaranteed taxpayer funding.

What else could we get for \$8.7 million? There has been an uplifting funding for the arts sector in this year's budget—and that is absolutely appreciated—but there are a few arts organisations that had their funding cut, like MARION. MARION is the ACT's writers centre and it has supported local writers for more than three decades. It is the only dedicated arts organisation for writers in the territory. Yet its funding was cut by \$35,000, leaving it with just \$150,000 a year to cover operating costs. For a tiny fraction of what the government provides to the horseracing industry, Labor could restore MARION's funding in full. That would actually cover MARION's funding 250 times over.

What about sports funding? Canberra is crying out for greater investment in community sport. Local clubs are struggling with aging facilities, growing participation and rising costs. We need more facilities, better facilities and much stronger support for grassroots sport. But guess what? The horseracing industry gets more money than the Brumbies, the Raiders, the Canberra Capitals, Canberra United and all of our community sports grants combined. For a fraction of the money directed to racing, the government could significantly expand community sports funding across the territory. It could help make sport more affordable for families and help support the volunteers who keep our sport running. For an additional \$1 million or so, government could even subsidise another public pool. Last year, Belgravia got around \$6 million to operate pools in the ACT. So \$1 million to operate an eighth public pool rather than just the seven it currently operates would go a really, really long way—maybe even Big Splash. That is what else we could do with this \$8.7 million.

What about the environment? The catchment groups have been providing land care and environmental restoration work in the ACT for decades. They protect waterways, restore habitat, support volunteers and help improve biodiversity across the territory. Each of the three catchment groups was receiving less than \$200,000 a year in government funding, and Labor has given them the position that that funding at that level needed to go through an open procurement process in the name of probity and value for money—for less than \$200,000 per year. Those groups were then required to compete for funding that they have depended on for years. After what has been a really long and contentious process—it is still underway; we do not have a final decision—it looks quite likely that the three catchment groups may lose their funding. They did that

for probity because environment groups have to go through public procurement for amounts less than \$200,000 per year—but not the horseracing industry. The horseracing industry gets 40 times that without any kind of procurement. How is it that Labor is approaching probity that leads to one group getting 40 times what another group gets outside of public procurement?

The minister has told repeatedly that closing Saturday library services at Kippax, Erindale and Civic was not a budget decision. But it is clear to everyone that those branches could open on a weekend—just like other branches could open on a weekend—if we had more librarians, which is what the Independent Working Group review said. We asked the Labor government to commit to restoring Saturday public library services in our suburbs within the next 10 months, leaving quite a lot of time for workforce planning. But the Labor government has refused to do that. Opening Kippax, Erindale and Civic libraries on Saturdays would cost a fraction of the \$8 million allocated each year to the horseracing industry.

What else has been cut in this budget? I do not want to revisit a matter that has already been through question time and been the subject of a motion today, but there was a very small amount of funding that Community Options were expecting to receive in the budget from the government. I do not want to open up exactly what the money was, what it was for and whether it has been removed—it was expected by that group. That small amount of money could have been provided. I think the vast majority of Canberrans and the elected representatives here think that, with disability cuts coming in from federal Labor, it is really important to be funding our community sector at the moment. But, no; we can see what the Labor government value when they put \$8.7 million into the horseracing industry but they do not fund all of these small pockets of money that I have just laid out.

That funding, \$8.7 million, could restore and double the Rent Relief Fund; restore funding for arts organisations that received a cut; restore weekend access to public libraries in our suburbs; restore funding for our catchment groups; give a big uplift for community sport; subsidise a new pool; and fund Community Options. But the Labor government has chosen not to do all of those things and instead fund the horseracing industry.

The horseracing industry receive this funding outside any grant or procurement process. They get fixed multiyear funding, indexed for five years. Operation Kingfisher found serious corrupt conduct with a procurement in the former Deputy Chief Minister's office. The Labor government is telling us they have taken many steps to ensure they are spending money with good process and probity. They are putting our environment and community groups through enormously complex commissioning and procurement processes, and they are saying it is because of probity. So, again, I will ask publicly: Labor government, will you keep funding the horseracing industry outside of any grant or public procurement process and, if so, what is the reason that you can do it in that case but you cannot do it in any other case? If you are going to put future funding through a commissioning or procurement process, what exactly is the service the ACT government will be contracting from the horseracing industry? What is the service you intend to write in the contract if you going to contract this out? What is it that the ACT people have received for the \$100 million of public funding that they have so far spent on the horseracing industry?

The Chief Minister often talks about the economic contribution of the horseracing industry. The horseracing industry commissioned a report into this. Generally, an industry-commissioned report will give a pretty rosy assessment—so I was really surprised to read this one. Their own report shows that the majority of the economic contribution comes from gambling and from ads about gambling. That is not an economic contribution supported by most Canberrans.

(Second speaking period taken.)

I am really surprised that economic contribution is supported by the ACT Labor Minister for Gaming Reform. It is almost as if the Labor government is compromised when it comes to supporting gambling industries. We may hear that the horseracing contributes tax. We have talked about this so many times. There is the point of consumption tax or betting operations tax. The Treasurer himself told us it was a tiny amount. It is less than \$250,000 and, in return, they get \$8.7 million of public funding.

The horseracing industry sometimes talks about their community contributions from the Community Chest. The horseracing industry get \$8.7 million of public funding this year. They hand back \$50,000 to some selected community groups. They receive \$8.7 million and they give out \$50,000. The government would do much better in supporting the community by contributing the \$8.7 million direct to the community rather than channelling it through the horseracing industry. The horseracing industry did not even increase their Community Chest funding this year. They get a generous index that is the envy of every single other funded organisation, but they did not even pass on their index to the few community groups that they buy social licence from.

The horseracing industry do not just get funding outside of public grants and procurements processes. They do not just get more funding than any other arts, sports, environment or community sector body in Canberra. They also get other special benefits from the Labor government. As well as getting funding under these special deals, rather than having to go through pesky public tenders or grant processes, the horseracing industry now have a special law. That law was made to help them out with their workers compensation, because their premiums were rising, due to the fact that they are operating the ACT's most dangerous industry. Other dangerous industries get regulated or shut down. This one gets underwritten and propped up by the Labor government.

A parliamentary committee inquiring into workers compensation premiums and insurance ran from January to September last year, and 50 individuals and organisations submitted to say they were struggling with their costs. The Domestic Violence Crisis Service said their workers compensation payments had increased four- to five-fold since COVID and, as a result, they have had to make cuts to staffing and rape crisis services. The horseracing industry did not bother submitting to that inquiry.

On 22 May 2025, Minister Pettersson met with the CEO and chair of the Canberra Racing Club. On 2 September, after that meeting, Minister Pettersson introduced an unprecedented law that allows the executive to give special access to the ACT government Default Insurance Fund for workers compensation. Minister Pettersson and Chief Minister Barr have made only one determination under that new law. They have

not made it for the 50 people and organisations who submitted to the parliamentary inquiry into insurance. They have not made it for the Domestic Violence Crisis Service, who had to sack staff and cut rape crisis services because they could not afford their premiums. Labor government has made that exception to help out the horseracing industry. The Canberra Racing Club were not even listed as a stakeholder consulted on that new law, but they appear to have been the primary, the only, beneficiary of that new law. This is remarkably good access for a stakeholder to get.

The horseracing industry cultivate their special relationship with the Labor government. They place a lot of emphasis on information, access and relationships with the ACT government, particularly now that they are in their redevelopment phase. The Canberra Racing Club get senior public servants and ex-senior public servants from key portfolios to serve on their committees in key roles like treasurer, chair and vice-chair. Duncan Edghill, was a director-general of Major Projects Canberra and, at the same time, he was also treasurer of the Canberra Racing Club. He was holding both roles when both organisations, the ACT government and the Canberra Racing Club, were looking at plans to redevelop Thoroughbred Park. Duncan Edghill resigned due to perceived conflicts of interest after the government released their plans for the site. Liz Clarke, after her appointment as chair of the Canberra Racing Club, told the media:

I retired from the ACT public service in 2021 after an extensive management career where I headed the government's major venues portfolio, including Exhibition Park, GIO Stadium, and Manuka Oval, and the government's property portfolio. The club's relationship with government will be extremely important as we move into our redevelopment phase and I think I am well placed to build on that relationship.

The horseracing industry are so blatant about this special relationship with the ACT Labor government that they brag about it to the media.

This is also about use of the site. Ahead of the last election, the ACT Greens commissioned a firm of architects, Munns Sly Moore, to show us what could go on that site. That precinct is now at the heart of our city. It is on light rail. It is a short distance from Civic. It is central and a great place to live. It is the opposite of urban sprawl; it is smart consolidation. It is exactly where we should have a new suburb. The Greens thought through what a new suburb needs: schools; shops; playgrounds, fully walkable with bike paths; a re-naturalised Sullivans Creek; lots of homes—between 5,200 and 5,400; and lots of public housing—at least 10 per cent.

So many people resonated with this vision. I got so many comments from people who were sick of driving past an empty racecourse day after day in the heart of Canberra, wondering why Canberra had chosen to dedicate so much well-located space to that when we are in a housing crisis. Only last week I asked this parliament to commit to set aside 10 per cent of this precinct for public homes. I am really pleased to say that ACT Labor have said that there needs to be public homes there—but ACT Labor will not commit to the amount. They will put in public housing but they will not tell us how much—not even as the development plans for the horseracing industry make their way through the system. If we get less than 10 per cent public housing there, that will be the values of the Labor government on full display.

Most of the time that site is sitting empty. I hear a lot of comments about that. The

horseracing industry do make other uses of the track between horseraces. They are now running an events facility out there. It is a great idea for government to host events. That is exactly what the Labor government does at the neighbouring site at EPIC. The Labor government pays for EPIC from public funds. Why is the Labor government also funding the horseracing industry to compete with the government-operated events facility site next door? Why are public servants and ex-public servants who worked on these events helping the horseracing industry in key board positions with their knowledge of how to run a good public events facility? This is why the budget is spending more than its collecting. It is a series of decisions like these that got us to where we are today.

Ending this multimillion-dollar hand out should be an easy decision, particularly after we have had the fiscal sustainability committee and the Saul Eslake report telling us that the ACT budget is unsustainable. This is not about whether the industry has the right to exist. It is about whether the industry should only continue to exist by being funded by rate payers to the tune of \$8.7 million per year. What makes the horseracing industry so special? Why is every member in here happy to spend \$100 million of taxpayer money to prop up this industry, whose primary economic contribution is gambling and ads from gambling?

When I first ran my amendments five years ago, I said at the time that I did not support a cliff edge; that we needed to transition the industry. I wanted to look after the workers and the animals involved. My first amendments only reduced allocated funding by 20 per cent. My proposition was let's cut it down each year and, at the end, they will not be funded at all. The Greens have been pursuing a phase-out for this industry to give them time to adjust and look after their people and their animals. This is now the fifth year I have lodged this budget amendment, and this time it removes the entirety of the funding—\$8.7 million. A lot of other organisations get cliff edges. Many organisations get their funds suddenly cut off by government. This industry has been on five years notice. Remember that when this comes up for decision again.

A lot of people are really angry about this. Every member in here who votes to continue funding now and who is considering voting to continue funding in future is going to have to have to explain why they backed this and not other things that have been cut. Anyone who continues to vote for this extraordinary funding arrangement, when these funds are desperately needed for the community sector, the environment sector, the art sector and community sport—for pools, for libraries and for local services—will need to explain that. I commend this amendment to the Assembly.

MR PARTON (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (5.51): I started working in commercial radio in 1983. At that time, CDs had not been invented; so I was playing music on vinyl records. At the radio station I worked, there were a lot of old records that had been in the library for a long time, and some of them were damaged. When you get a broken record, if it is scratched in the right way, it just keeps on hopping back to the same line of the song. We are hearing a broken record from Ms Clay, because we have heard all this before—Ms Clay's annual misinformation campaign to pursue her personal desire for there to be no horseracing in the ACT.

Before the Assembly considers Ms Clay's amendment, I think we have to examine some of the facts. But I think we also have to make the point very, very clear that there

is a bunch of people who earn a living—many of them basic minimum wage earners—in this legitimate industry who are genuinely wounded by the savage attacks that come at them from Ms Clay and others. It is true that the racing industry is funded through an MOU with the ACT government—and with good reason. The ACT government took the decision to sell the racing industry’s captive funding source, the ACTTAB, to help pay for light rail. There had to be a replacement for that revenue. The Chief Minister did not just wake up one morning and say, “I think I will do a favour for the racing industry.” It was an arrangement to replace the funding once provided by ACTTAB to preserve the racing industry’s contribution to our community and preserving an industry. The mechanism of funding that the government has chosen to pursue is the MOU, quite different from other jurisdictions who support their racing industries through a hypothecation of the point-of-consumption gambling tax—or, as we call it here, the betting operations tax—from which the government received over \$22 million in the last financial year. The MOU is for a fixed period so that the government can ensure the racing industry is doing what government has asked of it in order for funding to continue.

All racing bodies across Australia receive funding from the point of consumption tax, because they are seen as a valuable part of the economic, sporting and social infrastructure in their state and because there are enough Australians who consider that horseracing is actually a part of the fabric of this country. In the same way here, payments to the horseracing industry are not gratuitous payments with no community benefit, as alleged. It is an investment in an industry that provides positive economic, sporting and social benefits to our community, measured by independent economic reports every three years. The last report measured this benefit to be \$80 million. In return, the racing industry is accountable for a range of performance measures, including animal welfare, integrity, diversification, governance and other measures to ensure the government’s continued support.

Also, contrary to Ms Clay’s claims, the Canberra Racing Club in the period of this MOU is, in fact, growing. Its stables are full. There are 350 horses in work every day and 20 licensed trainers employing over 100 people. It conducts 25 race meetings in which new modern-day crowd records have been set for Black Opal Stakes Day, with 9,727 mostly young adult attendees. The Hops and Hooves Festival is one of the fastest-growing race days in Australia, with over 5,000 expected this weekend. Outside of race days, as was pointed out by Ms Clay, it conducts around 150 community events per annum. Recent events, such as the Mango Mela cultural festival and the Le Marche French markets attracted 20,000 attendees each—serving our community and driving tourism, supporting local business and enhancing social engagement.

The Canberra Racing Club hosts driver education training with Fifth Gear Motoring over 20 times a year, supporting Canberra school students to be safe drivers. It has also supported fundraising and subsidised events for Canberra-specific charities, including Hands Across Canberra, Roundabout Canberra, Pegasus Riding for the Disabled, Project Independence and dozens more. It is a member, active contributor and partner to community forums, including ClubsACT, the Canberra Business Chamber, the Property Council of the ACT, the Tourism Leaders Forum and the Canberra Convention Bureau. It partners and actively supports the Royal National Capital Agricultural Society and the Royal Canberra Show.

The fourth edition of the Canberra Community Chest is coming up, through which over \$65,000 will be donated this year to 12 worthy charity and community causes. Last year, Water Wombats received \$25,000 to continue their innovative aquatic therapies in the allied health services arena through the Canberra Community Chest. The Canberra Racing Club has invested in sustainability projects, including solar, water harvesting, urban farming, horse waste composting and worm farming to be more regenerative and support local business and gardens. All of these activities have seen the Canberra Racing Club employ over 150 workers during the last financial year and 100 more through agency, hospitality and horticultural staff.

The Canberra Racing Club prefer to support local businesses and trade. They showcase produce from many of Canberra's and surrounding regions to artists and producers on its race days and events and they showcase the best of Canberra. It is also an equally important contributor to Canberra's significant car enthusiast community, hosting the Canberra Festival of Speed, Canberra Cars and Coffee and many of the car drives in Canberra event days. The Canberra Racing Club, of course, has a precinct master plan, which it has been investing in over the last eight years—now known as DPA-08 Thoroughbred Park Precinct. This will provide a much-needed housing supply to Canberra in a mix of typologies I think it is time for the Assembly to support that this gets delivered.

In summary, the Canberra Racing Club is everything that Ms Clay says that it is not. It is growing; it is a significant contributor to our community economically, socially, and sportingly; and it is doing everything that the ACT government has asked for in the memorandum of understanding. The Canberra Liberals will not be supporting the amendment.

DR PATERSON (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services, and Minister for Gaming Reform) (5.58): The government will not be supporting Ms Clay's amendment. Ms Clay has pursued the same objective through successive appropriation amendments since 2022. The Assembly has not supported any of those previous amendments. Ms Clay's latest amendment continues to seek a significant change to the government's policy in relation to the racing industry before the conclusion of the current funding arrangements, effectively seeking a withdrawal of all government funding from the ACT racing industry through an amendment to the annual appropriation. The amendment would reduce the JACS and Community Safety appropriation from 1 July to an amount equivalent to the full racing allocation. This amendment is not the appropriate mechanism to set the future trajectory of the ACT racing industry.

I will not revisit the detail on how the current MOU arrangements came about—Mr Parton has already expressed some of that detail—but the government's position remains unchanged. The current MOU is a five-year arrangement between the territory, the Canberra Racing Club and the Canberra Harness Racing Club, covering 2022-23 to 2026-27. It remains in effect until 30 June 2027.

During last year's debate, I explained that the appropriation amendment was not the appropriate mechanism for making a major industry policy and financial change—and that remains the same. Decisions about future arrangements for the industry are under active consideration. However, this will require the completion of extensive policy

development and consultation with stakeholders before it has progressed to a point where formal plans can be considered. The fact that the agreement is due to expire does not diminish the need to recognise and manage it as an existing agreement. It is a separate question from determining what arrangements, if any, should apply following its expiry.

The government does not accept Ms Clay's proposition that the ACT racing industry provides no public benefit. The industry invites tourism, provides local employment and supports the economy by engaging with local suppliers. Thoroughbred Park hosts a range of non-racing-related community and commercial events. In last year's debate, I referred to approximately 120 events held at Thoroughbred Park annually. The Canberra Racing Club have spoken publicly about redevelopment plans involving housing, restaurants, cafes and shops alongside retained racing and event facilities. Any funding decisions should be informed by the potential effects on the racing industry workforce, the suppliers and animal welfare outcomes.

The funding arrangement supports sustainable economic benefits derived from non-gambling sources. These include tourism and employment flowing from racing but also non-race day events such as the Canberra Festival for Speed and a range of other music and cultural events, including the French market day, which recently saw 20,000 Canberrans attend. I really commend the Canberra Racing Club, their CEO and board, for the work that they have genuinely done to support diversification of their club. They really are a true leader in the ACT in demonstrating that you can diversify your revenue and income away from a reliance on gaming. The future agreement may provide government with leverage to support further diversification, but outcomes should be informed by careful policy development and consultation rather than predetermined in this debate.

Ms Clay's explanatory statement refers to the absence of a public tender or grants process. This does not account for the ACT context in which there are only two racing clubs—meaning there is limited scope for competition in delivering local racing functions. The absence of a competitive process does not mean an absence of oversight or public value. The current MOU contains a performance framework which includes KPIs and reporting expectations regarding industry management, animal welfare, integrity, viability, governance, efficiency and accountability.

I assure the Assembly that the government is actively and thoroughly considering future arrangements. Accordingly, I urge members to support the budget unamended.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (6.02): I have a similar position on this amendment to the one that I laid out last year. The memorandum of understanding is currently in place. Often I speak in this place, and many of us do, about the importance of government integrity, accountability, and following through on commitments that have been made, so I am not inclined to support an amendment to the budget today that would have the intent—although the minister has laid out what the amendment would, in fact, do practically—of supporting a breach of that memorandum of understanding. As the minister indicated, it is set to expire on 30 June next year, so this is the last budget in which we are able to say that, unless the MOU is renegotiated. I want to make clear that, given it is up for renegotiation, my position on this in the future is likely to be different.

Certainly what I hear from people in my electorate of Kurrajong is that they do not understand the scale of funding that is provided and why the funding has been chosen over other options, initiatives, requirements and expectations across our community. I think Ms Clay made a strong case for some of the alternatives today. My advice to the government on this would be: do not sign a new MOU and then come back to the Assembly next year expecting us to support it in the next budget.

This is a minority government, and we have had multiple examples of decisions like that being made and blowing up in the Assembly because they were made without consulting the Assembly. So, given the level of community interest and the case that Ms Clay has made for this over many successive years, this is something that should be considered more broadly, not by the ACT government in isolation, and with the stakeholder in question. That is something that I would encourage the government to ask the Assembly to support—to engage across the Assembly to see what our views are on any proposed replacement for this memorandum of understanding and not put us back in this position next year.

I suppose the point I am making is that I appreciate Ms Clay's intent. I will not be supporting this amendment to the budget this year. I want to make very clear that I think she is right—that the current arrangement does not meet community expectations, particularly given the budget situation and particularly given how difficult it is to access funding for a range of critical community initiatives across the ACT. People are being told that we do not have funding for local sporting facilities, but this funding is being provided. Please engage with us. Please consult and collaborate with other members of the Assembly before signing a new agreement.

I also want to touch on what the minister remarked on regarding the racing club's work on diversification. I think she is right to point that out. They have been working on this for almost a decade. They are keen to put housing on this site, and it is a credit to them. There is some frustration regarding how long it is taking. As we discuss in this place, and the government makes decisions regarding shifting funding away from some parts of the community and encouraging them to diversify, we need to make sure other policy levers in the planning and approvals processes are not halting that diversification, slowing it down or keeping it from happening. I would love to see that process sped up so that government policy is supporting diversification, and, in this specific case, away from this MOU and toward putting housing on a site that is an incredibly good location.

I hope that makes my position clear. I thank Ms Clay for bringing this amendment forward in the debate today. I will not be opposing it. I look forward to hopefully being consulted on what happens in this area moving forward, as I believe not just I but also other members of the Assembly should be.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (6.06): I rise to raise concerns about the ACT government's ongoing subsidy to the Canberra Racing Club. I will be taking the same stance that I took last year, and I will not be supporting this motion today, but next year may be very different. I acknowledge that Thoroughbred Park is pursuing a diversification strategy, including the redevelopment of parts of the site for housing and other uses. Diversification has the potential to strengthen the club's long-term financial position and reduce its reliance on government support. However, the pace of that

transition remains slow, and the territory's budget challenges mean we cannot simply assume an 8½ million-dollar annual subsidy will continue indefinitely. As I said during last year's debate, I do not believe in breaking agreements, so I would like to see the subsidy phased out following the expiry of the current MOU in June 2027.

Before any new arrangements are entered into, the government should provide the Assembly with options to end the subsidy, including a rapid phase-out option. With the success of its events, the club may be able to diversify and reduce the subsidy more quickly. At a time of significant fiscal pressure, it is reasonable to ask whether continuing an 8½ million-dollar annual subsidy represents the best use of scarce public funds. The government should develop a clear pathway to reduce and ultimately end this ongoing support.

Question put:

That **Ms Clay's** amendment No 2 be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 4

Andrew Braddock
Jo Clay
Laura Nuttall
Rebecca Vassarotti

Noes 18

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

Question resolved in the negative.

Ms Clay's amendment No 2 negatived.

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (6.12): I wish to pass on the thoughts of our shadow attorney-general, Ms Chiaka Barry, who is unable to be here today. This is what the shadow attorney-general would like to say about this appropriation:

Mr Speaker, I had the unique position of sitting in the chair of the Estimates Committee this year. I heard from everyone across every portfolio area on the issues arising out of this budget and, more generally, the consequences of the ACT's deteriorating financial position. The Justice and Community Safety Directorate appeared on several occasions and there were some noteworthy points that arose out of those hearings. I want to touch on some of those now, starting with the Office of Parliamentary Counsel, because I think that this fundamentally goes to the beating heart of what legislators are supposed to do.

One of the most foundational roles of any elected member is to legislate. To do that effectively and responsibly, they must be able to access professional drafting services. To represent their constituents properly and fulfil their democratic obligations, they must be able to access drafting services. To contribute

meaningfully to debates and to the lawmaking process, regardless of the prospects of success of passing bills, they must be able to access drafting services.

Mr Assistant Speaker, it is entirely inappropriate that the government has full control over the capacity for opposition and crossbench members to actually do their jobs. The government has given itself unfettered power to dominate the resources of the Office of Parliamentary Counsel, which oversees legislative drafting services, and as a result it has become virtually impossible for the opposition to have legislation drafted.

Mr Assistant Speaker, I want to just read some of the comments that my office has received in response to the few drafting requests we have made. These raise serious concerns about the level of deliberate stifling of the ability of elected members to legislate. Comments like:

It is not presently feasible for us to draft all the amendments requested, given the extent of government drafting instructions received for the 26 and 27 program.

Another quote:

I will need to examine the proposal more closely, especially as we are heavily engaged on government work for the remainder of the year.

Fresh quote:

The amendments will take time and draw on limited resources.

Mr Assistant Speaker, while I appreciate that some amendments are more complex and will take longer than others to draft, members should not be outright refused the ability to draft amendments. The decision as to resourcing should not be based on the number of requests that have been made by opposition crossbench members, nor based on the government's own legislative agenda. The simple reason is that many opposition members are no longer making drafting requests because we have no confidence that they will be fulfilled. Chances are they will be rejected, or only partially completed, and this is of no use to anyone. Drafting services must be fair, accessible, discreet, and impartially available to every member of this place, and there should be separate teams for different members, to alleviate the risk of bias.

It is a matter for the Assembly to vote on the merit of each bill, but negotiating on legislative proposals and engaging in robust debate is part of our jobs, and it is healthy for our democratic system of governance. Passing bills more easily is one of the obvious perks of being in government. The viability or prospects of a successful passage through the Assembly chamber is not something that should be contemplated by legislative drafters. It is not for the government, Mr Speaker, to cripple and incapacitate the ability of other elected representatives from accessing drafting services.

We have also heard about changes to judicial appointment processes made by the Attorney-General to give herself different ad-hoc avenues of appointing judges and magistrates. These changes create an uncomfortable level of uncertainty, unpredictability and inconsistency in the processes used to appoint judicial officers in the territory. The insertion of a new process provides the Attorney-General with the power to make a captain's pick. It is as simple as that, Mr Speaker. It allows

her to repeatedly nominate her own selection to a panel and, theoretically, continue to do that until her pick is appointed. This is a frightening and unnecessary departure from the convention in the ACT, which has always involved an open expression of interest process to attract a wider field of candidates from diverse backgrounds and experiences.

Now, the reason why these matters in the context of estimates hearings is because it goes to the heart of access to justice and court backlogs, which are key measures contained within the budget statement. Indeed, judges are at the helm of administering justice. Under strategic objective of budget statement D, the Justice and Community Safety Directorate notes that:

The recent retirement of one of six resident judges will impact the court's overall performance against strategic targets until a replacement for the resident judge is appointed.

What we found is that the Attorney-General's changes to the appointment processes further delayed that appointment, and there was no clear difference in the circumstances that warranted this change. As a result, it took 125 days to fill the vacancy left by Justice Loukas-Karlsson after her Honour retired on 15 December 2025, which would have been significantly shorter if the Attorney-General had issued an expression of interest.

This directly contradicted the Attorney-General's media release at this time, which stated that the ACT government "will soon commence the process of appointing a new Supreme Court judge". Mr Speaker, that process never commenced. Instead, the Attorney-General waited until she made changes to the notifiable instruments on 26 March 2026 so that she could facilitate some appointments, at which point she made two judicial appointments days later.

The other vacancy was caused by the retirement of Chief Magistrate Walker on 19 December 2025, at which point—or soon after—the Attorney-General could have issued an EOI to line up a replacement to be sworn in immediately after her Honour's retirement ceremony on 30 March this year. This had not happened. For comparison, the most recent appointment of John White SC as resident judge through the EOI process took 70 days rather than 125 days. Even when you factor in, in the 70 days, Christmas and New Year break, it is still a shorter process time.

Mr Speaker, by the Attorney-General's own admission, there is no reason why the EOI process could not be initiated to proactively prepare appointments once an impending retirement has been announced. Ultimately, the Attorney-General was responsible for unnecessarily delaying justice for many Canberrans and exacerbating the backlog in the system. This is a fundamental breach of her responsibilities, to the extent that justice delayed is justice denied, and her decisions should only work towards increasing access, equality and fairness in the justice system. To that end, it is noteworthy that the case clearance indicator contained in this year's budget revealed that the clearance rate in ACT courts is behind target in terms of the backlog recorded.

(Extension of time granted.)

Mr Speaker, it remains unclear in the budget what complementary measures that should assist in enhancing the administration of justice actually involve. For example, what the modernising of critical case management systems will actually

look like and when it will be completed remains an area of ambiguity. This reinforces the need for the government to provide adequate detail and service delivery metrics in their budget statements, rather than vague or empty statements of monetary allocations.

Mr Speaker, related to the theme of justice, the Victims of Crime Commissioner outlined the very concerning reality of an increasing number of victims across the three registers—the Adult Offender Register, the Youth Justice Register and the Affected Persons Register. Ms Ford outlined the confronting statistics—which I suspect have since increased—that revealed a 257 per cent increase in the number of victims on the Adult Offender Register alone, and a 142 per cent increase in the number of victims on the Affected Persons Register. Specifically, at the end of 2022 there were 149 registered victims. At the time of the budget hearing there were 532 registered victims. The Commissioner also noted that the number of submissions made by victims to the Sentence Administration Board increased by 123 per cent in one year.

Despite these alarming increases, Mr Speaker, this budget does nothing to assist the Victims of Crime Commission to manage the associated workload by way of increased resourcing. There are a number of possible underlying reasons as to why there has been such an increase. While I do not think it is helpful for me to speculate, I would suggest that it is a symptom of systemic failure that has gone untreated for years under ACT Labor. Mr Speaker, I would not be surprised if there was a correlation between the increasing number of victims and the increasing rates of recidivism.

And Mr Speaker, that leads me to discuss precisely that topic—reducing recidivism—which was a key metric in the budget. Unfortunately, we have seen the government's plan to reduce recidivism by 25 per cent by 2025 fail dismally. Rather, the budget statements report that the rate is increasing. This is nothing to celebrate, Mr Speaker. It is an indictment on the system more broadly and on the functionality and utility of AMC today.

Mr Speaker, it is no secret that AMC is not performing the way that it should be. It is not working as a rehabilitation centre. It is riddled with issues that need to be seriously reviewed. People go there for committing a crime, are exposed to more crime inside, and are released, only to reoffend and end up back there. This is not good for achieving the purposes of sentencing, and it is certainly not in the interests of the community.

These failures are a reflection of an incompetent government that has demonstrated no will to clean it up, Mr Speaker. It is time to take the objective of reducing recidivism and therefore improving rehabilitation outcomes seriously. Not only are new targets needed, but targeted investment, review and management systems are required. Once again, Mr Speaker, this budget offered nothing to balance the scale of justice and Canberrans again have missed out.

DR PATERSON (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services, and Minister for Gaming Reform) (6.27): The 2026-27 budget for our police and emergency services is an investment in people and the safety of our city. It is all about supporting Canberrans where they live, work and contribute across our growing city. In this fiscally constrained environment, this budget targets investment where it is needed most—to strengthen community safety and deliver better outcomes for all Canberrans.

ACT Labor is strongly committed to community safety. That is why we are investing in ACT Policing, our ACT Emergency Service responders and the teams that support our first responders in the vital work they do. Every day, around the clock, frontline staff in ACT Policing and the ACT Emergency Services Agency show up ready, willing and in service of our community. They are dedicated and professional. They are resilient and they are absolutely essential. The ACT government recognises the critical role frontline staff in ACT Policing and the ACT Emergency Services Agency play in keeping our community safe, and that is why our budget reflects this through new and ongoing investment.

As the demand on ambulance services continues to increase and our population grows, the government is investing in more frontline paramedics so this critical workforce—which is facing pressures around Australia—can respond when needed. The government is committed to growing our paramedic workforce, with an investment of \$26 million over four years. This four-year funding will strengthen ambulance response capability and provide additional resources to support effective paramedic rostering, helping ensure our ambulance service can continue to meet the needs of our growing city.

A key part of the funding is 32 new roles, including 20 ambulance paramedics, six highly-specialised intensive care paramedics and six operational support positions. This workforce builds on the 30 additional paramedics funded in the 2023-24 budget in response to the implementation of the new roster. This funding will deliver capability uplift through additional ambulance educators, experienced ambulance managers, a clinical simulation technician and vital staff in the communications centre—the first line of response when community members dial 000 for an ambulance, often in times of distress, where the care and expertise they receive in that moment are critical. Together, these investments will help ensure the ACT Ambulance Service remains well-equipped to meet increasing demand.

The 2026-27 budget also supports growth and wellbeing of our paid firefighting workforce. We have invested \$32 million over four years to grow our firefighting workforce at the new Molonglo Emergency Services Station. We have already seen this investment come to light with ACT Fire & Rescue beginning to operate out of the station just a few weeks ago.

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.

DR PATERSON: This funding includes 35 new roles, including 29 firefighters, among them experienced Fire & Rescue commanders, and six operational support positions.

This budget also invests in the infrastructure planning needed to support our emergency services now and into the future. An investment of \$2.1 million, including \$1.3 million in capital funding and \$800,000 in expense funding, will underwrite the development of the ACT Emergency Services Agency Infrastructure Master Plan. This work will guide strategic maintenance of existing facilities and help identify the infrastructure and station locations needed to meet the future demands of our growing city. The

government will also progress the design of the ACT Fire & Rescue Special Operations and Breathing Apparatus Facility at the new Molonglo Emergency Services Station, ensuring our emergency services personnel have facilities that remain state of the art and built to evolve as capabilities, equipment and community needs change.

As our growing city needs more paramedics and firefighters, it also needs more police. While Canberra remains one of the safest jurisdictions in Australia, we cannot be complacent. As our population grows and the demands on policing evolve, we must continue to invest in the people who support the safety of our community. The government continues to progress its commitment to increase the workforce capacity of ACT Policing through ongoing recruitment initiatives. In the 2024-25 financial year, 89 new recruits graduated and commenced service with ACT Policing, followed by a further 88 recruits in 2025-26. Since 1 July this year, 19 recruits have graduated, with an additional 20 expected to graduate in September. Additional courses are anticipated to commence throughout this financial year.

ACT Labor understands that keeping our community safe means backing our police officers with the infrastructure they need to do their jobs effectively. On 21 August 2026, I announced that the ACT government is continuing plans to progress a new City Police Station and ACT Policing Headquarters in Canberra's CBD. This is a significant milestone in delivering the modern policing infrastructure our growing city needs and deserves. Through this budget, the government is investing more than \$3.7 million to advance this project to the next stage of procurement and maintain momentum on this critical investment in community safety. Following the request for expressions of interest launched in June last year, the request for proposal process is now underway with shortlisted proponents. This project will replace the aging facilities of the current City Police Station and ACT Policing Headquarters.

As this Assembly has previously heard, the government is also enhancing ACT Policing firearms storage. The government will provide capital funding of \$2.1 million in the 2026-27 budget for armouries and to replace assets at several ACT Policing facilities. This investment ensures firearms storage meets appropriate safety standards, while also improving the workplace facilities ACT Policing staff rely on. The government is committed to improving community safety through firearm reforms. Twenty million dollars has been allocated through the 2026-27 budget, bringing the total capital investment to around \$24 million, including an \$18 million investment by the commonwealth government, to build a digital firearms registry to support the ACT's participation in the National Firearms Register. The government will also provide ongoing funding of around \$1 million per annum to maintain this system. I recently confirmed our support for the National Gun Buyback, which will be an avenue for lawful firearms owners to surrender eligible firearms and reduce the number of firearms in our community. We are continuing to work with the commonwealth to finalise the parameters of the buyback.

There are also several other ways we are improving the safety of Canberrans, including through enhancement and upgrades of major ICT infrastructure systems. The budget provides \$5 million in capital and expense funding for one year to undertake phase 2 upgrades of major ICT systems used by the Emergency Services Agency, which will safeguard continued operation of critical ICT systems. This is in addition to investment in the territory's radio network, the communications system relied on by agencies

across the ACT government.

In addition to ICT systems, the government understands that the ACT Emergency Services Agency needs safe and reliable vehicles and well-resourced workshops to service a capable and emergency-ready fleet. Capital funding of \$23.7 million over three years and \$2.2 million in expense funding over two years will replace operational fleet vehicles, upgrade workshop facilities and boost workforce capacity through the Fleet Delivery Improvement Program and a heavy vehicle national law assurance program.

The initiatives outlined in the 2026-27 budget are investments in safer communities, stronger frontline services and a more resilient Canberra. As our city grows, so too does the responsibility to ensure our emergency services and police officers have the people, facilities and resources they need to keep Canberrans safe. This budget delivers on that responsibility. It invests in modern infrastructure; it strengthens frontline capability; and it supports the dedicated men and women who protect and serve our community every day.

Again, I acknowledge the extraordinary commitment of our frontline emergency services personnel, ACT Policing officers and our support staff and volunteers. Whether responding to emergencies, supporting victims of crime, protecting lives and property or helping our community through times of crisis, they perform their duties with professionalism, courage and compassion. Their work is challenging, often unseen and too often taken for granted. This government recognises their contribution and remains committed to ensuring they have the support to do their job safely and effectively. This budget backs our frontline services; it backs community safety; and it backs the future of Canberra. I commend the budget to the Assembly.

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

Statements by members

World Myositis Day

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (6.38): Today is World Myositis Day, and I would like to acknowledge the thousands of Australians living with myositis. Myositis is a rare and often debilitating disease that causes muscle weakness, pain and extreme fatigue. For many people, it can lead to loss of mobility, difficulty swallowing and loss of independence. It affects children, adults and older Australians, with some forms appearing in childhood and others later in life.

There is currently no cure and, because it is a rare disease, diagnosis can be delayed and research funding remains limited; yet the impact on individuals, families and carers is significant. I acknowledge the work of the Myositis Association of Australia, which provides support and advocacy for Australians affected by this condition and works to increase community awareness. As we mark World Myositis Day, I encourage Canberrans to learn more about this disease and support continued investment in research, treatment and awareness for those living with this challenging disease.

RSPCA ACT

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (6.39): I rise to speak about my recent visit to the RSPCA ACT. It was great to spend time with CEO Michelle Robertson and her incredibly hardworking team, some of whom were volunteers and some of whom were staff. It was a wonderful opportunity to see firsthand the dedication, compassion and professionalism that goes into caring for vulnerable animals across our community.

What stood out to me the most was the commitment of the staff and volunteers. Every day they work tirelessly to rescue, rehabilitate and rehome animals, while also supporting pet owners and families throughout Canberra. Their work extends far beyond the shelter itself, helping to educate our community, promoting responsible pet ownership and ensuring animals receive the care and dignity they deserve. I was deeply impressed by the passion of everyone I met. Whether they were caring for animals, supporting foster carers, assisting with adoption or helping families keep beloved pets in their homes, it was clear that animal welfare is very much more than a job for them; it is a calling. I commend RSPCA ACT and its hardworking CEO for its outstanding contribution to our community and thank everyone involved for the important work they do every day.

ACT Telangana Association of Canberra

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (6.40): One of the great things I enjoy about this job is the ability to join the community in celebrations. The other night I had the opportunity to join the ACT Telangana Association for their cultural celebration which they held at Kambri, at the Australian National University. Over 600 members of the community came together to share food, share culture and share dance, both modern and classical. It was fantastic to see so many people getting into it. The kids were so excited to be on stage to perform in front of their friends and family, and the adults were as well, I might say.

Congratulations to everyone involved in organising the event, including Sunitha and Sateesh and everyone on the executive committee, and all the volunteers who make such an event possible. This is an event that required significant money to run, including booking the venue, running the sound and the lights, and all the catering. Also, there is the coordination that is required to ensure everyone has a good time and has their opportunity in the spotlight.

Canberra Roller Derby League

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) (6.41): I rise this evening to talk about the great privilege I had to attend my first ever roller derby game at the end of August. As the minister for women, I was invited to the Evelyn Scott School gymnasium to watch the Canberra team, the Capital Brawlers, take on Central Coast Roller Derby United. Being from the Central Coast, clearly my loyalties were divided and it was very stressful. After a nail-bitingly close finish, the good news is the Brawlers came out on top, but it was a very close game.

I would like to thank everyone who made me feel so welcome and who was so evidently proud to show off a sport that is so inclusive in terms of gender diversity and body

positivity, attracting and welcoming players and officiates of all body types and backgrounds. Everyone is welcome. Roller derby is one of the fastest-growing women's and team sports in the world, providing an opportunity for women—including young women, who often drop out of sports—to stay active through an engaging and supportive community.

Canberra Roller Derby League was established in 2008 and is a not-for-profit community sporting organisation that aims to promote health, sport and the community in the Canberra region. Appreciation was expressed to me for the ACT government's support of the sport, including the permanently-marked roller derby circuit track in the Evelyn Scott School gym.

It was lovely to be among a broad cross-section of the Canberra community as they cheered on our players. I give special thanks to the tournament coordinator, Celeste—or, rather, Mae Q Sqwheel, because everyone in roller derby has a fascinating name—for introducing me to a world of blocking, jamming and bracing.

Discussion concluded.

Adjournment

Motion (by **Ms Cheyne**) proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

Employment—artificial intelligence

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (6.43): I rise to give this excellent speech written for me by a work experience student, Ms Alina Farrall from St Mary MacKillop College in Tuggeranong. She did a fantastic job on the speech and I will read it with pride. It states:

Artificial intelligence, the new technology of our time. A technology once created to assist society, could be the beginning of an economic crisis. With the introduction of AI into the workforce, businesses are turning to AI to increase efficiency of services, rather than utilising human labour and capital due to AI's comparative advantage.

However, we must set aside comparative advantage and focus on the benefit of the individual person and the future of the Australian Economy.

The World Economic Forum's Future of Jobs Report 2023 projects a net loss of 16% in clerical and secretarial roles by 2027, largely caused by generative AI taking over editing and design jobs.

Legal support jobs are also at risk, with over half of their core tasks being projected to become automated.

With several large Australian employers announcing redundancies or restructures that are attributed to AI, knowledge-intensive industries are forecasted to only have a 1.2% growth over the next five years, which is devastating when the employment growth was 1.9% from 2021 to 2026.

AI is beginning to take over simplistic aspects of entry level jobs, which will cause a decrease in expertise over time as it doesn't nurture the learning growth of individuals in the workforce.

I do acknowledge that AI can contribute to economic growth, though human employment is vital to continue the circular flow of income. Therefore, human employment should be prioritised to benefit society, rather than focusing on short-term efficiency.

From a youth perspective, AI creates a barrier for how they can enter the workforce. Entry level jobs being performed by AI restricts pathways into various careers; therefore, career development becomes scarce for the following generations.

Also being largely discussed is the environmental impacts of AI, which is a detriment to both the economy and the ecosystem.

AI-related water consumption could equal the basic annual domestic needs for 1.3 billion people by the end of the decade². Australia has had some catastrophic droughts in the past, and we're projected to experience increased drought conditions during the 2026/2027 summer³. Though proper forecasts from September onwards are yet to be established.

There has also been an increase in data centres being built to support AI. More than 3,000 will be built globally by 2030⁴, with New South Wales already having 90 data centres planned and another 20 are under assessment⁵. This takes up viable land; therefore, resources that were once on that land may become scarce.

Overall, AI should be kept out of employment to ensure economic safety. While it has cemented a place at a minor scale, we shouldn't allow it to expand into automating jobs—removing current employees from the workforce.

I thought that was an incredibly thoughtful contribution by Alina. She has also provided me with references, so, if any members are keen to see where she got that information, please come see me. I thank Alina once again for her excellent work.

Hannah Rikin—childhood

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (6.47): I similarly wish to read a work experience student's speech, who was with me in July: young Ms Hannah Rikin. It is a delight to read her speech, which is primarily about her life's journey thus far:

Good afternoon members of the ACT Legislative Assembly,

My name is Hannah Rikin, and I am a 15-year-old student at Canberra High School. I am from a small island nation called the Federated States of Micronesia—FSM. The FSM consists of four different island states, which include the islands of Yap, Chuuk, Kosrae and Pohnpei, the capital. I am from the islands of Yap, Pohnpei and Kosrae.

I spent most of my life on the island of Pohnpei. When I was six years old, my mum decided to continue her education and attend a university in New Zealand. Because of this change, I moved with my grandparents to the Marshall Islands,

where they were missionaries. I spent four years in the Marshalls, and then I moved back to Pohnpei when I was 10. After the Marshall Islands, my grandparents were still missionaries, but they moved to the US territory of Guam. After a year of living in Pohnpei, I went to Guam for a summer trip, and then I ended up living there for a year. I moved back to Pohnpei in 2023 and stayed until January of 2026, when I moved to Australia, specifically Canberra, and it has been a great opportunity.

The experiences I had in Guam and the Marshall Islands were similar to those in the FSM, but Australia has been a whole different story. My experiences here so far have been quite pleasant, aside from the cold weather. Australia offers a wide range of opportunities, unlike the FSM. My placement here at the Assembly has been a great window of opportunity for me, as it has given me a better understanding of how politics works in Australia.

Living in Canberra has been great in terms of education—the electives, clubs and classes I take at my high school, which I hope will contribute to building my character. Clubs such as our Interact Club, raise money for different charities. My metal technology elective teaches me to be more hands-on and to build things. University is also an exciting prospect for me. We have the Australian National University here in Canberra and different universities across Australia.

To share more about my country, the FSM has a special relationship with the United States. We have an agreement alongside two other countries, the Republic of the Marshall Islands and the Republic of Palau. This agreement is called the Compact of Free Association—COFA. COFA allows citizens of these nations to work, study and live in the US without a visa. So, the question my family often gets asked is: why Australia?

Well, my family came under the Pacific Engagement Visa. This visa was an opportunity for my parents to explore a different path, rather than the one everyone else was taking. The process of getting here was very character-building for my family. I am very appreciative of my experience because I get to be involved in different programs that are not accessible for my people back home.

I would like to express my gratitude to Mr Cain and his staff for accepting me as a work experience student, and I would like to thank the ACT Legislative Assembly for the help I have received for my placement thus far. Thank you and Kamorale!

Those were the words of Hannah Rikin, a year 10 work experience student from Canberra High who was in my office in July this year.

Family and domestic violence—femicide

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) (6.51): I would like to acknowledge the tragic deaths of several women and a child in New South Wales over the weekend, and the children who remain in hospital, in circumstances that appear to be family and domestic violence related.

While the individual circumstances of each woman and child killed are different, what

unites them is profound loss felt by families, friends and communities. Every death is a tragedy; every death is one too many. This year, Australian Femicide Watch by Sherele Moody reports that 52 women have been killed in Australia. That is an average of one woman a week, and it is only September. Every life lost leaves an absence that cannot be replaced, and my thoughts are with all those who are grieving at this difficult time.

These events are a heartbreaking reminder of the devastating impact domestic and family violence continues to have across our country, and I know they also resonate deeply here in Canberra. For many people in our community, reports of these deaths are distressing and confronting. They bring back painful experiences, raise fears for loved ones, and reinforce the reality that domestic and family violence remains one of the most serious challenges facing our society.

As a government, we remain steadfast in our commitment to preventing domestic and family violence. We know there is more work to do and will continue working alongside victim-survivors, community organisations, frontline workers and our partners across jurisdictions to strengthen prevention, early intervention and response.

But behind every headline is a person, a family and a community forever changed. Today we remember those whose lives have been lost, extend our condolences to those who are grieving, and recommit ourselves to the vital work of building a community where everyone can live safely, free from violence and fear.

Nepali ACT community—floods disaster in Nepal

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (6.53): I would like to mourn the disaster that was unleashed with the flash flood in Nepal and recognise the impact this has had on our Canberra community.

I often talk in this Assembly about the connection between events that happen on the other side of the world with our community here in Canberra. Disasters with their devastating human toll reverberate around the world. Canberrans watch with alarm, fear and terror—watching the news trying to get the latest update, worrying about friends and loved ones, praying that a lack of contact is not a portent of bad news and fervently reaching out to their friends and family to make sure they are okay.

We have a large and significant Nepali community here in Canberra, and they have responded admirably to this disaster, raising money for those struggling. I know it is not an easy time for you, and my words are of little value, but I have really admired how you have all come together as a community in response to this.

I also want to talk about the cause of this disaster, and I want to quote Senator Nick McKim. He stated:

The tragedy in Nepal is a climate warning written in death and destruction. Of course, the people of Nepal, who are paying such an unbearable price for that tragedy, committed almost none of the emissions that have caused it.

We in Australia should look in the mirror, and at emissions we have released to date,

and reconcile ourselves to the impact this is now having on our environment and on our fellow humans.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

The Assembly adjourned at 6.55 pm.

Schedule of amendments

Schedule 1

Appropriation Bill 2026-2027

Amendment moved by Ms Clay

2

Schedule 1, part 1.5

Page 5—

omit part 1.5, substitute

Part 1.5	506 018 000	56 616 000	311 468 839	874 102 839
Justice and Community Safety Directorate				
