



DEBATES
OF THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

DAILY HANSARD

Edited proof transcript

24 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 **Friday, 16 October 2026**.

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Thursday, 24 September 2026

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

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

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

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

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

Petition Ministerial response

The following response to a petition has been lodged:

Capital Football—Woden Valley Soccer Club—petition 47-26

By **Ms Tough**, Minister for Women, Seniors and Veterans, dated 3 September 2026, in response to a petition lodged by Mr Steel on 11 June 2026 concerning the inclusion of the Woden Valley Soccer Club in the National Premier League Girls competition in 2027.

The response read as follows:

Dear Mr Finlay

Thank you for your letter of 11 June 2026 about petition E-PET-047-26, lodged by Mr Chris Steel MLA, regarding the Inclusion of Woden Valley Soccer Club (WVSC) in the National Premier League (NPL) Girls.

Mr Chris Steel MLA was recently appointed Minister for Sport and Recreation and is therefore the minister responsible for responding to this petition. As Minister Steel is also the sponsoring MLA for the petition, responsibility for the Government's response has been transferred to me, as the Minister for Women, Seniors and Veterans, to avoid a conflict of interest.

WVSC continues to play a significant role in the ACT football landscape. It is one of the largest community clubs in the Territory, with particularly strong participation numbers and a notable contribution to the growth of the women's game.

Football in Canberra consists of approximately 40 clubs. Capital Football, as the recognised governing body for the sport, is responsible for determining the structure of the NPL and the rules governing admission to, and exclusion from, the

competition. Decisions relating to participation, promotion and relegation within the NPL may be subject to differing views, however, these decisions are ultimately the responsibility of Capital Football.

Not all clubs seek NPL participation, and for some, entry is not currently feasible under the competition's admission criteria. Reflecting this, players regularly move between clubs to access NPL opportunities. While this mobility supports player development pathways, it can also require players to leave behind long-standing club affiliations, friendships and community connections.

The ACT Government is unable to comment on the considerations that informed Capital Football's decisions regarding admission to the Girls NPL from 2026.

WVSC is a long-standing participant in football in the ACT and, as with all affiliated clubs, matters relating to league participation are determined by Capital Football in accordance with its governance and competition arrangements. Similarly decisions relating to Capital Football's governance and competitions are matters for the organisation to determine independently. The ACT Government does not influence those decisions.

I acknowledge the concerns raised by WVSC, noting that the teenage years are a critical period for sport participation and that girls experience higher rates of dropout from sport than boys. Maintaining strong participation and development pathways in female football is important to retaining girls in the sport, supporting positive health and wellbeing outcomes, and strengthening the future of women's and girls' football in the ACT.

In this context, the former Minister for Sport and Recreation recently wrote to Capital Football's newly appointed Board leadership seeking reconsideration of this matter, including whether the continued absence of an NPL Girls pathway in the Woden Valley best supports the development of female football in the region. While Capital Football will ultimately determine club participation and competition structures, the former Minister for Sport and Recreation encouraged the organisation to work closely with WVSC to support the ongoing development of its girls' pathway programs and to ensure the club's aspirations for future admission to the NPL are given appropriate consideration.

Thank you to everyone who took the time to sign the petition. I certainly appreciate your passion for football and for the retention of young girls in football pathways.

Motion to take note of petition

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

That the response so lodged be noted.

Order of business

Ordered that notices Nos 1, 2 and 3, Executive business, relating to the presentation of three bills, be postponed until a later hour this day.

Sport and recreation—Tuggeranong ice sports facility

Order to table documents

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (10.03): I move:

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

- (1) all briefs, advice and business cases provided to the Minister for Sport and Recreation or the Minister's office concerning the viability, cost, risks, delays or likelihood of the Tuggeranong Ice Sports Facility proceeding since 1 January 2016; and
- (2) all communication between the ACT Government and the project proponents concerning the viability, cost, risks, delays or likelihood of the project proceeding since 1 January 2018.

I will keep it brief today, in the interest of time. I know we have a budget to get through, but I think that, after 10 years of being promised an ice rink, the Tuggeranong community and the ice sports community deserve answers on how everything came about and how we lost our ice rink.

With these documents, we are seeking to understand what informed the decision to announce an ice rink back in 2016 and at what point in time it became clear that the proposal was no longer viable. I urge members to support this motion. I understand that there may be an amendment forthcoming from the minister, which we welcome.

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage, and Minister for Sport and Recreation) (10.03): The government will be supporting this motion for the production of documents under standing order 213A. I am circulating an amendment, which I now move:

Add:

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

I will explain the intent of the amendment, which I have discussed with Miss Nuttall. It is to extend the time period for the production of documents to 30 days, notwithstanding the provisions of standing order 213A for an earlier period.

The reason for that is that there are genuine staff absences within the CMTEDD team that are causing resourcing issues when it comes to being able to manage that issue within the timeframe. As a result, the team needs a little bit of extra time to be able to work through the collation and production of those documents for the Assembly. We do want to provide what we can to the Assembly in public, so that they have an understanding of what was presented.

There may be a range of constraints on that, which will be assessed in accordance with the usual procedure. It is disappointing for the community in Tuggeranong and the ice sports community that we have not been able to come to an agreement with the proponents in relation to this matter. We will continue to work with the ice sports community to understand what opportunities there are to improve facilities going forward.

There was a tender evaluation process, which followed an expression of interest process that shortlisted the proponents, Cruachan and Pelligra. A non-binding agreement was signed. There was quite a bit of back and forth with government, ahead of the government trying to seek agreement on a binding agreement with the proponents. The government put money on the table, as part of that—\$16.265 million.

The information that we were able to provide publicly, based on probity advice, was that the amount of money requested by the proponents was more than double what was originally sought, and there were a range of unacceptable risks to the government, which meant that we could not agree. Ultimately, the proposal did not represent value for money.

To the extent that we can, we will provide information about what has occurred since 2016, in terms of documents about this matter. It pre-dates my time as the Minister for Sport and Recreation, but we will certainly undertake the work necessary to give those documents to the Assembly in accordance with the procedure under standing order 213A.

Amendment agreed to.

MR PARTON (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (10.07): I want to speak briefly to this. We are so keen to support this motion from Miss Nuttall. It is a cracker of an idea. Obviously, we are supportive of the amendment from Mr Steel, too, on the basis of practicality.

This motion is reflective of the theme established by this government over a long period of time, but which has escalated in recent months. That theme is spin, and spin which never lines up with reality at all. The theme basically is that they are going to promise you all sorts of things, Mr Speaker, but we are coming to see that they are just about never going to deliver them.

One of the biggest truths which has come to light in the Tuggeranong ice rink saga is that, when it comes to this government, the spin never lines up with reality. It never does. We are seeing that play out in so many areas right now, including the school funding scenario. We cannot ever believe what the government says publicly, because what goes on behind closed doors is radically different. This motion seeks to open some of those closed doors so that we can see exactly what was told to who and when, and what information was withheld, if any.

We will get truckloads of spin from this government in the lead-up to October 2028, and most of it should just be taken straight to the tip. Obviously, if any of it can be recycled—and they do. This was recycled. This was recycled twice.

Mrs Morris: Three times.

MR PARTON: It was a renewable piece of spin, if you like, but they have chosen not to renew it for a fourth time. I am very supportive of what Miss Nuttall is doing in this space.

MRS MORRIS (Brindabella) (10.10): I want to thank my fellow member for

Brindabella for bringing this motion to the floor of the Assembly today. Miss Nuttall and I may not always see eye to eye on every issue but, certainly on this issue, we could not agree more. Tuggeranong deserves answers, and so does the broader Canberra community.

Tuggeranong has been led on and betrayed by a government in chaos, and a party who, at each election, has obviously been desperate to do and say whatever it takes to get it across the line. The opposition leader put it perfectly. This is a masterclass from the ACT government on spin. I am sure none of you need gym memberships, because you are spinning all the time and getting all your workout done!

We cannot take this lightly. If we are being brutally honest, people have had it with politicians and governments who lack integrity and do not deliver on their word. They are sick and tired of being lied to and being led on. That impacts every single one of us in this place. It impacts Labor, Liberals, the Greens and the Independents. That is why it is so important that every single one of us sends a message in the loudest terms that breaking an election commitment three times over is just not acceptable.

If you are going to break that trust, you had better have—I will use parliamentary language—a very good reason for doing it, and you had better be transparent about it, because the community deserves nothing less. Labor promised to deliver an ice rink in Tuggeranong and, instead, Labor delivered 10 years of chaos and disorder for a community who, frankly, are just so sick and tired of always being neglected and left behind. That is the only thing that they can rely on this government delivering for Tuggeranong—neglect.

It is characteristic of this government: chaos and disorder. Hundreds of millions of taxpayers' dollars have been lost through corruption, waste and incompetence. I refer to CIT, Campbell primary, MyWay+, MyDHR, an abandoned payroll system, and the list goes on. Three censured ministers, a deposed Deputy Chief Minister, a government in minority, without confidence in supply.

When it comes to the ice rink, a much-anticipated, three-time-running election commitment for my community, we have had years of inaction, years of delay, years of excuses and then a public campaign from this government to shred the reputation of their development partners and to lump the blame at their feet. Is it any wonder that industry confidence in the ACT has fallen to the lowest level in Australia? This government is bad for business and bad for Canberra.

Labor promised an ice rink in 2016. They promised construction would begin in 2020. They only signed a heads of agreement with development partners in 2022. They only set aside land in 2023. Last year, after three elections when they have made these commitments, they were publicly undermining their development partners for holding up development, for holding up the progress of this project, only for us to learn later that they were sitting on the contract all along. They had not even given them the contract. It was only after a motion in this Assembly, brought forward by Mr Milligan and I, with the support of the Assembly, that they had to hand that contract over to their development partners. What an absolute disaster and mess. They sat around for six years and did squat, before they even engaged with their development partners.

Now, the messaging that they are putting out, the spin which the opposition leader has referred to, is that they are the ones who have been hard done by, supposedly. It is like it has come to them as some really shocking surprise that, a decade after making this commitment, construction costs have gone up. It is like, “Wow, it’s shocking!” They cannot believe that costs have gone up over the past decade.

The community would really like to know, and deserve to know, what advice this government received, and when it received it, on the viability, the costs, the risks, delays or the likelihood of an ice sports facility ever proceeding in Tuggeranong since the commitment was first made in 2016.

I thank Miss Nuttall for bringing this motion to the Assembly. It is a very important one, and I commend it to the Assembly.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Environment and Planning—Standing Committee

Statement by chair

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (10.15): Pursuant to standing order 246A, I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Environment and Planning in relation to e-petition 15-26 and petition 49-26 concerning the management of wombats in the ACT.

These petitions were referred to the environment and planning committee on 27 May 2026 and relate to a draft technical report on managing wombats that included an option to reclassify wombats as a controlled native species which, if adopted, could permit the killing of wombats.

The committee wishes to acknowledge the significant community interest in this petition, which gathered over 3,000 signatures, underscoring the strong affection and affinity that many members of the community have for these animals. The ACT government’s response to these petitions indicates that there is no current intention to recommend that wombats be declared a controlled native species under the Nature Conservation Act 2014, or to develop a native species management plan for wombats. Given this, the committee has resolved not to undertake a formal inquiry into this matter at this time.

Speaking in my personal capacity as a member for Ginninderra and not on behalf of the committee, I want to thank the community for bringing forward this petition. They got over 3,000 signatures from ACT residents. It actually attracted 20,000 signatures. I think people were genuinely alarmed at this prospect. People are very supportive of our landowners and our farmers, and the needs, difficulties and challenges in managing our land, and have a strong desire for government to assist our landholders. Clearly, that needs to be done in a way that co-exists with our wildlife and does not include lethal management of wombats.

Statement by chair

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (10.17): Pursuant to standing order 246A, I wish to make a

statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Environment and Planning in relation to e-petition 38-26 and petition 52-26 concerning the Curtin Presbytery redevelopment.

These petitions were referred to the environment and planning committee on 28 May 2026 and relate to the proposed community housing development at the Curtin Presbytery site, 5 Strangways Street. The proposed development has generated significant community concern regarding its consistency with the Territory Plan's objectives, the scale of the proposed development, its potential impact on nearby school environments, traffic and safety, and the cumulative pressures of development in the area on local infrastructure and services.

After careful consideration of the petitions and the ACT government's response, the committee has resolved not to undertake a formal inquiry into the matter at this time. The committee is satisfied that the ACT government has engaged with the issues in its response to these petitions and considers that a committee inquiry would not materially advance consideration of the matters raised. The committee also notes that there will be further opportunities for the community to comment on the development application during the statutory assessment process under the Planning Act 2023.

Transport and City Services—Standing Committee Statement by chair

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (10.19): Pursuant to standing order 246A, I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Transport and City Services 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 two appointments and reappointments to the following bodies:

- Animal Welfare Advisory Committee
- ACT Veterinary Practitioners Board

I will now table a schedule of statutory appointments considered during this reporting period. I present the following paper:

Transport and City Services—Standing Committee—Schedule of Statutory Appointments—11th Assembly—Period 1 January to 30 June 2026.

Appropriation Bill 2026-2027

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

Detail stage

Schedule 1—Appropriations—Proposed expenditure.

ACT Gambling and Racing Commission—Part 1.19

Debate resumed from 23 September 2026 on the question:

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

Proposed expenditure agreed to.

Public Trustee and Guardian—Part 1.20

Proposed expenditure agreed to.

Independent Competition and Regulatory Commission—Part 1.21

Proposed expenditure agreed to.

Total appropriated to territory entities.

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (10.20): Mr Speaker, we have someone who might be keen to speak to total appropriations who has gone to collect their speech. I might seek your guidance on whether we might be able to give them a little bit of time to get here.

MR SPEAKER: You are on your feet, Miss Nuttall, so you should keep talking.

MISS NUTTALL: I did manage to talk earlier to sports and recreation. Certainly, within this budget, probably the big thing that we were most disappointed about was, of course, the Tuggeranong ice rink, which had been a promise of this ACT Labor government for three elections running. There were a lot of people in the community who were looking forward to it very much. There were many people in the Tuggeranong community for whom this was the biggest issue on their mind at the time. To find out that, after 10 years, the money that had been promised to the people of Tuggeranong and the ice sports community was not forthcoming was not ideal. I will leave my remarks there.

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (10.22): Thank you, Miss Nuttall; that was elegantly done. I am sorry; I had to grab my speech from my computer. Things moved a bit quickly!

First of all, I want to withdraw something and correct the record. Yesterday, when I spoke about the Treasurer's advance, I said that the Treasurer had not circulated this until 14 August. He did circulate it on 14 August; I was referring to that copy. He had previously circulated it in June, through the Speaker. He has very politely pointed this out to me, and I have checked my records. He is right. I wanted to clear that up. There is a lot of attention on that Treasurer's advance, so I apologise for indicating that that did not come out before the budget. I remain concerned about the numbers in there. The Treasurer's advance is for urgent, unforeseen or exceptional expenses—

MR SPEAKER: Ms Clay, just on the line item, we are on the total appropriated to territory entities; we have not yet got to the Treasurer's advance.

MS CLAY: Would you like me to sit down and return to this matter later?

MR SPEAKER: We will deal with the total appropriated to territory entities; then we will go to the next line item.

Proposed expenditure agreed to.

Treasurer's advance—Part 1.22

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (10.24): I remain concerned about the actual numbers themselves. The Treasurer's advance is for urgent, unforeseen or exceptional circumstances. It should not be used routinely. When the Treasurer's advance is used, that means government have not planned ahead. They have had expenses that they did not know about, and that they were not able to include in their regular budgeting cycle.

I mentioned this in question time, and we are waiting for the information to come back. There were three matters there that I noticed. There was a \$3.2 million capital injection for defect rectification at the Canberra Hospital pharmacy. I am interested in why government did not identify that during construction or defects liability inspection. Why is the territory paying for that? Why are we paying for that defect rectification, and exactly how did that come about in the first place?

I also noted the \$700,000 Treasurer's advance to cover shortfalls in Canberra Theatre ticket sales. We are waiting for confirmation of the information. \$700,000 is quite a lot by which to fall short. That is a significant portion of the Canberra Theatre budget. I am particularly concerned when government is in the process of spending \$317 million on a new 2,000 seat theatre, and it is also underwriting ticket sales for the theatre that it already has. I do not know whether this is going to become a pattern. I do not know whether government has planned through our theatre capacity and exactly what we need, and planned through the liability that we will incur if our government-operated theatres are not performing in the way they were.

There has been a longstanding call from the arts sector for a performing arts strategy that tells us how all of our different performance spaces and theatres work together. I think this is a really clear example of why we need that. It is also a significant amount of money. One of the arts organisations, MARION, had \$35,000 removed from their budget. When we are talking about changes of \$700,000 in the arts budget, that is a really significant amount for the arts sector.

There was also an \$18.3 million Treasurer's advance for additional child protection costs. We did get some information on that from the minister in question time. Essentially, he told us that child protection is important and that government will do it—which, of course, we all understand. We all agree that child protection is extraordinarily important. The question is not whether we should be protecting our children and whether the government should be paying for that. Yes, we should be protecting our children; and, yes, that is core government work. Of course, the government should be paying for that.

The question is: why is a Treasurer's advance called for? Why didn't the agency understand what their costs were and budget for them properly? Why have those costs suddenly accelerated by \$18.3 million in a way that government did not expect?

I have read the minister's statement this morning; I imagine it will be read out or circulated later today. I can see from that statement that there appear to be fewer kids entering care, which is certainly great news. Why, then, are our costs suddenly blowing

out by over \$18 million, in a way that we did not expect? Are they staying in care for longer? Are the costs of statutory or out-of-home care accelerating? What is going on there? We do need an explanation, and to know whether there is some massive directorate failure here. Is there some massive problem happening with the protection of our children? And why are we using a Treasurer's advance for this purpose?

All of these costs are significant in a budget in which ACT government has been operating unsustainably and in which ACT government is cutting services for Canberrans. I am talking about amounts of \$700,000, \$18-odd million and \$3½ million. To put that in context, that \$3½ million is double the Rent Relief Fund which kept thousands of people in their homes and out of homelessness. That was cut in last year's budget. It has finally been restored, and it is open for access again. That \$3½ million is double what that is—more than double. It is a significant amount.

We reckon that, for \$3.2 million, you could probably reopen the libraries at Kippax and Erindale. We have heard repeatedly from the minister that that is not a budget decision; it is a workforce and rostering situation. It looked to us, from the independent review that was conducted, that in actual fact the government was told, "If you had more librarians, you would be able to operate a reliable service that meets the standards of the community." We were very happy for the government to take 10 months, or a year, to work that problem out. That does look like a budget solution to us, and we have 3½ thousand Canberrans pleading with government to reopen their suburban branches.

On pools, we are operating seven pools for several million dollars through Belgravia. I would imagine that, for \$3½ million, you could probably subsidise another two or three suburban pools. That is something that would be highly valued by Canberrans at the moment. There is an aquatic strategy underway at the moment. I hope that aquatics strategy is looking at the very modest costs that we are already spending and how we could make sure that our suburban pools are more sustainable, and add more suburban pools, so that we are providing Canberra with the services they need.

There are lots of services that really matter to Canberrans that are being reduced, cut or not increased to meet our population needs, so these amounts of money that are coming out of the Treasurer's advance are concerning.

Proposed expenditure agreed to.

Capital works reserve—Part 1.23

Proposed expenditure agreed to.

Total appropriations.

MS LEE (Kurrajong) (10.30): What we saw from the education minister this week was a deliberate attempt to deflect and to wilfully misconstrue the true situation on school budget cuts. In doing so, she has added to the confusion, the distress and the anxiety being felt by our school leaders since receiving advice about their 2027 budgets last month and that she has demonstrated that she is more interested in playing semantics than trying to do the right thing by our school communities, by coming clean and taking responsibility for cutting school budgets. Let me remind members of what the minister

said just this week. In response to my question to the minister about what analysis, if any, was conducted to assess whether school budget cuts would affect a school's ability to operate a full five-day-per-week timetable, the minister said:

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.

That in itself is an admission that schools have received their budgets, indicative or otherwise, that are likely to have a negative impact on their ability to operate at their current levels in 2027. The minister then went on to say, "There have been no cuts." This contradicts her own directorate. This contradicts the ACT Australian Education Union. This contradicts ACT parents. This contradicts the principals and staff who have all come out since receiving these indicative budgets back in August.

Miss Nuttall and I received a briefing from the education officials, including the director-general, some weeks ago, where they discussed and provided us with documents which show at least 18 schools that have had their budgets decreased by more than five per cent. These are official documents from education officials, including the director-general. Last month, in the media, the Director-General of Education said: "The really important thing, where there's larger decreases, is we do recognise that this is a transition we need to support schools through." The minister said only days ago that principals should not have been surprised by changes to their budgets.

AEU ACT Branch Vice-President Simon Vaughan, who is also a college principal, said of the reductions: "There is a quantum of savings I will have to find." Dr Vaughan went on to say: "If we have to, for example, cut staff, that may cut programs." Probably most damning, ACT AEU President Angela Burroughs said this week on radio, when asked specifically about the minister insisting that there have been no cuts:

We'd like the minister to come clean with the public about budget cuts to ACT public schools, to stop the political trickery of arguing that there's no cut to education budgets because the school communities know otherwise. They know that staff are being moved on, and principals are in this dreadful position of having to make cuts, and there's just no clarity or transparency.

Ms Burroughs went on to say:

We just want honesty and transparency, and the minister to take accountability in explaining to the community what the impact of these cuts will be on school support.

But, according to the minister, there have been no cuts. Yesterday in the *Canberra Times* we saw they have data which shows at least 58 schools will have their budgets cut in 2027, compared with the amount of funding they received in 2026. The article directly quotes the minister where she says:

We recognise this is a challenging conversation for a number of schools. Each of these schools has its own story, with different pressures and different opportunities

to navigate, while adjusting to the new model.

If, as the minister insists, there have been no cuts, what are the pressures and challenges the minister herself is referring to?

According to the minister, there have been no cuts and yet we saw in the media this week direct quotes from a staff member in an ACT primary school who said:

We have a lot of high-needs children. I don't think that has been looked at. Everybody's just got given this budget and had to make the cuts. But nobody's actually considering the level of support that the kids need.

We saw that Mount Rogers Primary has already had to let go 27 of 30 of its learning support assistants and that Latham Primary will have a quarter of its budget slashed, which is the largest proportional budget cut of all schools. But, according to the minister, there have been no cuts. The data obtained by the *Canberra Times* shows that our schools that support some of Canberra's most vulnerable students are amongst the hardest hit: Malkara, more than \$2.8 million cut; Black Mountain, more than \$3 million cut; Cranleigh, more than \$1.7 million cut; the Woden School, more than \$1.6 million cut. But, according to the minister, there have been no cuts.

The minister stood in this place only yesterday and refused to answer questions as to how an almost \$10 million cut to these specialist schools will be offset by \$7 million in additional funding. The minister stood in this place only yesterday and said, "I can absolutely assure the Assembly, as I have already done multiple times, that no specialist school will receive less funding in 2027 than in 2026." The minister also pushed out a video statement through her socials only last night and said, "Specialist schools will not receive a single cent less in 2027 than they had in 2026." Yet, when asked a direct question about how her \$7 million of additional funding for specialist schools will offset the almost \$10 million of budget cuts to these schools, she refused or could not answer.

The minister should not be allowed to hide behind semantics. She can argue that the total education budget has not been cut, but my question was clear: it referred to the budget cuts to schools, not the total education budget, which we all know includes funding that is not part of the funding that is allocated to individual schools. She can argue that it is reallocation or an adjustment, but the stark reality is that we are talking about cuts. That is what it is: cuts; cuts of over \$40 million. The AEU ACT has actually put the figure at more like \$50 million.

What we say in this place matters. The minister should be ashamed of herself for wilfully deflecting; for causing incredible distress and confusion for principals, teachers, parents and school communities; and for continually and emphatically denying the cuts, when teachers on the ground and principals being forced to wear the burden of her government's decisions know the truth. It matters to parents; it matters to students; and it certainly matters to those principals facing the stress of having to make hard decisions about what staff to let go, what programs to cut and what support needs to be reduced, because this government has failed them.

As Ms Burroughs said, "A government cannot outsource its decision-making and then outsource the blame for it too." As Ms Burroughs said, the minister needs to "stop

asking our public school principals to carry a burden that was never theirs to carry”. As a principal, who asked to remain anonymous, said on ABC Radio just this morning:

I am a principal in the ACT system and the message we’ve consistently received from the Education Directorate is that we have no choice but to get our budget down to zero deficit this year. No exceptions. Principals are being bullied.

What is perhaps most concerning about this whole episode is that the minister appears to believe that, if she simply repeats talking points often enough, it will somehow become reality. But the reality being experienced by school communities is very different. The minister says that there are no cuts, but principals are being told that they have no choice and have to find savings. The minister says there are no cuts, but staff are being advised they are losing their jobs.

(Second speaking period taken.)

The minister says there are no cuts, yet her own directorate has provided documents showing dozens of schools receiving reduced funding compared to this year. The minister says there are no cuts, but school teachers and leaders are examining what programs have to be reduced, what supports have to be withdrawn and how they can manage with less. Again, as Ms Burroughs said:

We would like the minister to come clean with the public about budget cuts to ACT public schools, to stop the political trickery of arguing that there are no cuts to education budgets, because the school communities know otherwise.

Just this morning, we have this: “An internal multi-hazard risk assessment document viewed by the *Canberra Times* shows the directorate created a crisis management team to deal with the fallout from changes to public school budgets in 2027,” and “it said principals may suffer stress, anxiety and conflicts as they communicate the impact of budget cuts, such as changes to staffing to their communities”.

The ACT Education Directorate “created a crisis management team to deal with the fallout from the changes to public school budgets in 2027”. This is extraordinary. So, while the directorate was creating a crisis management team to deal with the fallout of these funding cuts, the minister was standing in this very chamber, with no credibility, and claiming, in her own words, “There have been no cuts.” At some point, the minister needs to stop trying to create her own version of events and start listening to the people on the ground who are actually dealing with the consequences of these decisions. Again, as Ms Burroughs has pleaded:

We just want honesty and transparency, and the minister to take accountability to explaining to the community what the impact of these cuts will be on school support.

The minister is well aware of the cuts to school budgets, and her answers this week were a deliberate attempt to deflect and deny and create a narrative that she knows is wrong and is not befitting of the education minister, let alone the Deputy Chief Minister. I know that the minister is new to the education portfolio. We know how diabolical the former education minister was and where we are now after 10 years with her at the helm. But, frankly, given the new minister’s performance to date, no-one can have any

confidence in her ability to turn the ship around.

This chaotic, dysfunctional government has already let down a whole generation of students. Unless the education minister stops playing semantics and stops, in Ms Burrough's words, the "political trickery" and starts taking these significant issues seriously, she will leave a legacy of betraying a whole new generation of students—and that the Canberra Liberals cannot support.

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (10.44): Briefly, the Greens are looking forward to working with the Labor government for next year's budget. We are always happy to engage. I had some excellent conversations with the Chief Minister last week on that item. We are very much looking forward to making sure that we get the right budget outcomes for our community and for our environment in next year's budget.

MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi) (10.44): Over the years that I have been a member of this place, I have been extremely critical of Labor's inept approach to the budget and to fiscal management more generally. This ineptitude is demonstrated by the fact that we have total borrowings of more than \$20 billion and an annual interest expense that will soon exceed \$1 billion, despite many years of tax hikes on local residents and businesses. But I want to give credit where credit is due. Reading over this year's budget, it is clear that the government have taken a number of decisions to try and get spending under control. I am sure that they understood that some of those decisions would cause them political pain, as we have already seen with big changes like the deferral of infrastructure spending and the voluntary redundancies, and with small changes like library hours. They deserve credit for actually taking some difficult decisions when it might have been easier—but less responsible—to kick the can down the road.

Other parties in this place have been quick to declare a fiscal emergency and to demand reviews and inquiries but have not offered their own proposals that would return the territory to a sustainable budget position. I wish they would. Our community would be much better served if our parties of government each had their own plan for fixing the budget and we could have an honest debate about what plan the community prefers. Instead, we have one or two parties who want the community to believe that there is a painless path back to sustainability. This position is simply dishonest.

While returning to surplus will be difficult, dealing with the territory's debt will be even worse. Total borrowings are currently forecast to peak at more than \$23 billion. That is almost \$50,000 per Canberran. There is absolutely no prospect of paying that down without a significant imposition on each and every member of the community. We need to be honest with the community about the position we are in and what budget repair is going to demand of us. So I give the government credit for changing direction with this budget. However, I believe there is a long way to go.

One of the government's challenges in the past has been that its rosy forecasts have not been borne out. It has consistently demonstrated a tendency to expect more revenue, lower spending, smaller deficits and lower debt than is actually realised. What I want to see from the government is not more ambitious financial plans but more ambitious implementation of those plans. I want to see the territory embrace the tools that have proven themselves over and over in this jurisdiction and around the world; I want to see

cost-benefit analysis conducted on all significant capital and expenditure proposals; I want to see infrastructure transparently prioritised where it provides the largest net benefits; I want to see rigorous evaluation built into every new policy initiative and a willingness to reform or sunset those which do not deliver; I want regulatory impacts to be properly measured and honestly considered in policy development; and I want ministers to treat the idea of “value for money” as a sacred duty rather than an excuse for inaction.

None of these initiatives are revolutionary. Indeed, aspects of them are already part and parcel of the work of some directorates and their processes, but they are not used consistently and systematically. We ought to take full advantage of them and mandate their use across the entire public sector and empower public servants at every level to use them, because they are the absolute gold standard for delivering policy development and good outcomes. These tools are useful, because they will help get expenditure under control, they will help to ensure that policies and programs can deliver real benefits for the community and they will help to ensure value for money. They are exactly what we need, given the territory’s fiscal position.

The other thing that we need as we move into an era of cuts to spending, agencies and the infrastructure pipeline is fairness. Despite the false hope that is peddled by some in the political arena, the fiscal position means that some cuts are unavoidable. But, when cuts are made or projects are deferred, we should try to ensure that the burden is shared across the community. I am concerned that this may not be the case. The government has trumpeted \$700 million in savings from infrastructure projects in this year’s budget, but it has categorically and consistently refused to provide a list of projects that have been affected. It has been put to me that no such list exists; that the \$700 million is a mere change in the fiscal envelope, a change that is more abstract than real and so it is not possible for a list to exist. But we do know the North Gungahlin Health Centre has been delayed; we know the Casey Emergency Services Centre has been delayed, which means the New Gungahlin Police Station is also delayed; and we know the Casey indoor sports facility has been delayed—four projects all in one electorate, and that is my electorate of Yerrabi.

To be fair, the government has also said it will now stage the Kingston Arts Precinct and future works on the Monaro. So there are impacts outside of Yerrabi, but those are the only affected projects that I have been able to find outside of my electorate. I am deeply concerned that Yerrabi is being asked to shoulder most of the burden here and that the government is determined to keep this hidden from us. I have been extremely fair to the Treasurer in my contribution today. In exchange, I ask him to be fair with me and the people of Yerrabi going forward. Show us where the government is saving the \$700 million and show us how those decisions are fair to my community.

The growth of the Gungahlin region over the last two decades has come entirely from people putting their faith in the government—in this Labor government. People moved into the district and built homes, community and lives, knowing that Gungahlin did not yet have a full offering of local public services. They trusted the government would deliver health care, the police, the schools, the public transport and the community infrastructure that they would need as the population grew. They paid their rates and taxes and they waited and waited and waited. As they have waited, our population has grown to more than 100,000 people, which means there is now incredible pressure on

the limited public services that we have—yet the government continue to stall. They will not even tell us when to expect delivery of these promises. I am sure our local Labor members will say that these concerns are overblown and point to the second college that is now being built. Our community absolutely welcomes that and are very grateful. But we would have welcomed it at any time in the last decade. When my daughter was at college in Gungahlin, I saw firsthand just how overcrowded the college had become.

It is not fair to lay the foundations for a new district, to promise residents public services and to impose taxes to fund those services and not deliver. But that is the experience of Yerrabi. Asking that same community to now shoulder the burden of the government's budget savings is just salt in the wound, and I would not be surprised if more people in our community start to turn their backs on ACT Labor. I hope we can turn this around.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (10.53): As we conclude debate on the 2026-27 budget, one issue stands out above others: fiscal sustainability. This budget acknowledges that the ACT's financial position has deteriorated. The government has introduced new fiscal targets, delayed around \$700 million in capital expenditure and taken some steps towards expenditure restraint. Those actions are welcome, but they do not change the fundamental challenge facing the territory. The budget remains in deficit, net debt continues to grow, borrowings are forecast to reach \$22.7 billion by 2029-30 and interest costs are expected to reach about \$1.2 billion a year. Interest is now the fastest-growing area of expenditure, rising from six per cent of territory cash payments to 11 per cent over the forward estimates. Every dollar spent on interest is a dollar that cannot be invested in public housing, schools, hospitals, libraries, community facilities or maintaining the infrastructure we already have.

Throughout this debate, government members have often challenged non-executive MLAs to identify offsets for new spending proposals. That is a reasonable principle. If members want to spend more, we should be prepared to explain how it will be paid for. But that principle should apply equally to the government's own decisions. We cannot demand offsets for community facilities, local services and modest investments while treating multibillion dollar capital projects as though they are exempt from the same scrutiny. The largest opportunities to improve the territory's financial position are not found in a local dog park, a community centre or a library; they are found in the major infrastructure decisions that drive borrowing and debt. That does not mean we should stop investing. Canberra is a growing city. We need transport infrastructure; we need schools; we need health facilities; we need housing; and we need community infrastructure. The question is not whether we invest; the question is whether we prioritise correctly.

Throughout this budget process, I have consistently raised the need for proper options analysis, transparent business cases and clear assessment criteria. Decisions should be based on evidence, value for money and community need, not simply on which project is largest or most visible and can attract tourists. At the same time, we cannot lose sight of the infrastructure that supports everyday life. Residents have raised concerns about the future of the Woden Community Centre and the Callam Offices precinct, the delays to the Southern Memorial Park, a lack of progress on active travel links, pressures on public housing and the availability of community services, schools in Molonglo. These are not secondary issues; they are the foundations of strong communities.

As Canberra becomes denser, the need for public facilities becomes greater, not less. We should not assume the private sector will deliver all the infrastructure communities need. There remains an important role for government in providing community centres, public housing, libraries, parks, open spaces and social infrastructure. I am particularly concerned that public housing has not kept pace with population growth. While the government's investment is welcome, the proportion of public housing relative to the ACT population has fallen, placing increasing pressure on waiting lists and support services. Growing the supply of public housing is not only a social responsibility; it is a sound long-term investment.

The other theme that has emerged through this budget and the fiscal sustainability inquiry is transparency. Too often, members are asked to assess programs and expenditure without access to the information required to do so properly. Whether it is capital works reprofiling, infrastructure costings, public asset decisions or school funding changes, the Assembly should be able to clearly identify what money is being spent on, what outcomes are being achieved and whether programs represent value for money. That is why I strongly support greater program-level reporting and stronger evaluation of government expenditure.

Ultimately, fiscal sustainability is not simply about accounting measures and budget aggregates; it is about fairness between generations. The government often describes its borrowing as funding generational infrastructure. There is some truth in that—future generations will benefit from many of the assets we build today. But future generations should not be expected to pay the entire bill. If we continue to rely on growing debt to fund today's priorities, young Canberrans will inherit the interest costs, the repayment burden and reduced budget flexibility. They will be asked to fund yesterday's infrastructure while also finding the resources to build the infrastructure they need. A sustainable budget is one that balances investment with affordability, ambition with discipline and current needs with future obligations. There is the challenge before this Assembly, and it is one we cannot afford to ignore.

Total appropriations agreed to.

ACT Gambling and Racing Commission—Part 1.19

MR SPEAKER: Members, before we move on, there is a bit of a glitch in the system in that, between when we adjourned last night and started this morning, we did not actually have a vote on the Gambling and Racing Commission. I propose the question that the proposed expenditure for the Gambling and Racing Commission be agreed.

Proposed expenditure agreed to.

Clauses 1 to 10, by leave, taken together and agreed to.

Title.

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (10.59): A vote for this budget is a vote to continue a Labor-led decline. The Treasurer should take it back to the drawing board and give it another shot. After all, it is already out of date. The Canberra Liberals cannot vote for

this budget, because it continues to send Canberra backward and it continues to put Labor's political interests ahead of the best interests of our community both today and into the future.

Budgets are about choices, and choices have consequences, sometimes immediately and sometimes later. But eventually you will be forced to face reality. The reality is that this budget shows the consequences of Labor's choices are coming and Canberrans are already feeling many of them—the consequences of a decade of bad decisions and a refusal to face reality; the consequences of a government that has used every budget over the past decade and a half to promote its own interests and its spin instead of the interests of the community; the consequences of their debt drive and a political philosophy that is devouring Canberra's capacity to stand on its own feet.

It has not been without warning. For a decade and a half, Labor has ignored the warnings, pushed ahead and blamed everyone else when things go wrong. When Labor's Chief Minister Barr inherited the treasury portfolio, the ACT had no net debt. It was, indeed, a net creditor. Fifteen years later, in this budget, Labor has already accumulated roughly \$13.5 billion in net debt by today and it is on track for \$24 billion in total territory borrowings by 2029-30. That means interest costs are increasing exponentially. This budget shows that, in the last year, Labor lost more to interest expenses than the entire amount it collected from residential rates—more on interest than every dollar households pay in residential rates. That is despite the massive increases that it imposed on Canberrans. A decade and a half of revenue maximisation through rates, but still Labor's debt drive has driven the cost of interest so high that even that vastly increased cost paid by every Canberra household is insufficient to even cover what this government has to find just to service its debt. That is servicing without paying off a cent.

We are on our way to over a billion dollars every year in interest expenses. That is money thrown away that cannot go to hospitals, doctors or nurses, money that cannot go to schools, principals, teachers or LSAs, money that cannot go to fixing roads or footpaths or to the basic services Canberrans should be able to expect for their taxes. Now those services are being cut. The value of our libraries is being undermined. The Canberra Institute of Technology seems to be collapsing through Labor's disinterest, school budgets are cuts and infrastructure projects cut or delayed. Despite the government's promises and repeated rhetoric of no deep cuts, that is exactly what it is doing—and the government wants someone else, anyone else, to take the blame. But the cuts are there and it is Labor that has presided over every factor that has contributed to them.

Any claim that it is just slowed growth in the public service is demonstrably false. Every year our public service is being asked to do more with less. Labor's ideological insourcing agenda is both increasing the workload of the public service and simultaneously making things more expensive. At the same time, the salary expenses table in the budget says that Labor will directly cut the public service next financial year and then continue cutting in inflation adjusted terms every year of the forward estimates. By some estimates, we are looking down the barrel of over seven per cent cuts to our public service.

These are the consequences of Labor's choices—Labor's choices but Canberra's

consequences—and Labor is still putting its own interests ahead of the community's interests and those of future Canberrans. According to this budget, last year alone, Labor took on \$3.1 billion in new borrowings—vastly above what it budgeted. Let me try to put that into perspective. Baby Evelyn was born at the Canberra Hospital in 2025. She was one of 5,317 babies born in that year in Canberra. Those children should be born into a city of opportunity and prosperity where they can aspire and achieve, where they can chart a course through life that lets them do amazing things, pursue an amazing career, find the love of their life, raise a family, own their own home, chase their dreams and do something exceptional. But every one of those 5,317 babies, like baby Evelyn, will grow up with the legacy of Labor's debt, taken out in their names. That \$3.1 billion in new borrowings last financial year amounts to around \$581,000 for every child born in that year. It is the equivalent of an apartment in Woden for every one of them. Those kids did not get that money and their families did not get that money, but they will inherit the burden.

Please do not underestimate it: Labor's debt dependence is a multigenerational burden that is holding Canberra back. Bad financial choices and debt dependence make you dependent and vulnerable. Under Labor, Canberra has become more dependent than at any time since we first achieved self-government. Canberra has become more dependent on decisions made somewhere else. This Labor government and this Labor Chief Minister have had decades to build a strong independent economy. The Chief Minister made it his personal portfolio. But 98 per cent of the ACT's economic growth over the last decade has been tied to the public sector—public money. Eighty-five per cent of our economic growth has been dependent on federal public sector spending, although that growth has fallen away under the Albanese Labor government. At the same time, Canberra's business survival rates have been consistently below the national rate. In the last decade, Canberra's economy has become more dependent on the federal government at the same time as Labor has eroded Canberra's bank balance. That means that we are more vulnerable now to future economic shocks—and the shocks will come.

Labor have had their shot. Canberra cannot afford to remain dependent. For years, Labor have talked about economic diversification, but too often their idea of a knowledge economy, for example, appears to amount to bringing more people into Canberra rather than creating more opportunity for the people who are already here. Canberra cannot just depend on bringing more people into town. Canberra cannot just depend on the next federal spending cycle. We cannot depend on continually importing economic growth. We need an economy with more resilience and more capacity to create opportunity from within.

Underneath all of this is a deeper problem, because too often this government has confused spending with achievement. It has treated the amount spent as evidence of value delivered. But we have seen extraordinary examples of waste, cost blowouts and poor decisions. *(Second speaking period taken.)*

We have seen systems of influence become so entrenched that too often the interests of insiders seems to matter more than the interests of the broader community. Canberra cannot afford to be held back by the Labor Party and entrenched political interests any longer. We need to reclaim the promise of Canberra as a city the nation can be proud of and restore Canberra's capacity to stand on its own feet. But that is going to take more than just tinkering around the edges; it is going to take a fundamental shift in

attitude. It is time to stop treating public money as never ending tab; it is time to stop confusing cost with achievement; and it is time to unwind the networks of influence that put insiders ahead of community.

A responsible government has to start by judging every decision by whether it leaves Canberra stronger, more resilient and more capable than before—whether it leaves Canberra better off tomorrow, or simply pushes today's costs onto the next generation. That means rebuilding fiscal resilience; it means broadening our economic base; it means making sure a government acts like a steward of the community's assets, rather than simply exploiting them; and it means creating the conditions in which people can take responsibility for their own future, build something better and help lift the people around them as they do so.

Imagine, as Mr Parton likes to talk about, Canberra unleashed. We need an ACT economy that backs enterprise, rewards initiative and creates the jobs of the future here in Canberra—and that means reinvigorating the private sector. As my colleague Mr Milligan frequently points out, it means supporting small and medium businesses, which are so often the first to take risks, the first to bring new ideas to market and the first to create new opportunities. It means recognising the critical role for purpose and community sector providers which deliver essential services, build social capital and make Canberra even more resilient. It means creating the right environment for local businesses and organisations, not just to survive but to thrive. Canberra should be a place where people with a good idea can back themselves, where initiative is rewarded and where we can create more opportunity, rather than simply importing growth from somewhere else. It should be a city where young Canberrans can see a future for themselves here and aspire to do something great.

But a Canberra unleashed depends on a connected Canberra, a city where people know that they are not on their own; where the networks around them are strong enough to help when things go wrong and strong enough to help people seize opportunities when things are going right; and where neighbours, sporting clubs, schools, community organisations and volunteers form the connective infrastructure that makes a community more than just a collection of houses. That spirit already exists in Canberra. Government does not need to manufacture it, but it should help create the conditions in which it can flourish. Connections depend on trust. People need to feel safe in their own communities. They need confidence that the people around them are overwhelmingly decent and acting in good faith. When that trust is broken, they need to know that someone will be there; that their safety matters and that the system will take what happened seriously.

That is the Canberra we should aspire to—more resilient, more connected, more capable of standing on its own feet; a Canberra where government expands the choices available to the next generation instead of spending those choices before they get a say. The decisions we make today will determine what will be possible tomorrow. Labor's choices, set out in this budget and in many budgets before, have left Canberra vulnerable—and they have held it back. Our responsibility is to change course, to restore Canberra's capacity, to leave this city stronger than we found it and to unleash what Canberra can become.

I am only the shadow Treasurer. The things I have spoken about span across our shadow

portfolios and across the budget. But I think it is important to acknowledge that the budget is a statement of priorities. The Treasurer is responsible for the budget. The budget that Labor has delivered this year continues a Labor-led decline. We must make a change for Canberra's sake.

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage, and Minister for Sport and Recreation) (11.13): I would like to start by firstly acknowledging the contributions by all members to the debate on the Appropriation Bill 2026-2027. I would particularly like to acknowledge the Greens for the transparent approach that they have taken to the appropriation and for our discussions ahead of the budget. I would also like to thank Mr Emerson for providing supply. I understand Ms Carrick may be supporting the passage of the budget day, so thank you. Should the remaining crossbench choose to support the budget, then they have my thanks. I look forward to engaging with them ahead of the 27-28 budget.

I think it is fair to say that this budget is being handed down in a time of unprecedented scrutiny of the territory's finances—scrutiny that I welcome, including on section 18s—as the government continues to deliver against our fiscal strategy, improving the bottom line while delivering community services and infrastructure that Canberrans expect and need.

The government is delivering against the fiscal strategy. In the interim result that was recorded unaudited at this point in time for the 2025-26 financial year we have seen a cash operating surplus. The interim outcome also shows lower net debt compared to the estimated outcome published in the 26-27 budget as a result of that better cash outcome. The 26-27 budget, of course, included new fiscal targets to deliver a cash operating surplus from the 27-28 financial year, so we in fact delivered that a year ahead of time. Today is, compared to the forecast in the last budget, two years ahead of the target. Today's interim outcome shows that the ACT government's commitment to improving the territory's fiscal position is working, and of course the cash operating surplus is an important step in our fiscal strategy in delivering on what we said we would do to improve the budget bottom line while ensuring Canberrans can benefit from high-quality local services. With a better budget position and lower than forecast net debt, the government is delivering responsible and responsive fiscal management.

Delivery against our fiscal strategy has been recognised through our credit rating. Standard and Poor's Global has confirmed the long-term credit rating for the Australian Capital Territory as AA, with a stable outlook, reflecting continued confidence in the ACT's overall credit worthiness and financial resilience. S&P has recognised the government's fiscal sustainability and budget repair strategy, noting the government has refined the fiscal strategy for the 26-27 budget to include more specific measures and targets to strengthen the territory's finances and support a return to operating balance and surpluses.

The 26-27 ACT budget is a budget that delivers on our election commitments through major investments in housing, health and community services, abolishing stamp duty for first home buyers and maintaining a responsible path back to balance and surplus. The government believes that delivering more housing for Canberrans is a moral and economic imperative. The budget delivers the largest investment since self-government for housing. This includes a \$364 million investment over four years for 450 new public

homes; an expanded program to repair, upgrade and bring on line vacant public homes; new affordable and community housing projects; and support for more than 1,000 future affordable dwellings, ensuring Canberrans have access to both short-term assistance and longer term housing options, whether they are renting, building or buying.

The 26-27 ACT budget delivers on ACT Labor's election commitment, making the territory the first jurisdiction in Australia to abolish stamp duty for all first home buyers as owner-occupiers. Stamp duty exemptions will also be expanded for pensioners and eligible NDIS participants, and all homebuyers who have not owned property in the last five years. This reform removes one of the biggest upfront barriers to home ownership and opens the door for more Canberrans to get into the housing market sooner. The budget complements planning reforms with a major package of tax cuts to support the development of the missing middle housing reforms. We have removed stamp duty on new titled properties being brought by owner-occupiers; continued the concession for owner-occupiers buying off-the-plan units; expanded this concession to all turnkey units, which is a newly constructed unit that was not sold off the plan; and introduced a time-limited 50 per cent reduction in the codified lease variation charge for missing middle developments in RZ1 and RZ2 areas. This lowers overall development costs while maintaining a return to the community.

The government deeply values the role that the community sector plays in supporting all Canberrans. They are a valuable and important partner to the government, especially in delivering essential frontline services. The budget brings investment in the community sector to over \$327 million in 2026-27, with additional investments to respond to domestic sexual family violence, deliver additional homelessness services, legal assistance and support the LGBTQIA+ Canberrans and more. Beyond the dollars, we have provided long-term arrangements certainty to the community sector, directly addressing concerns that we heard from the sector and from members in this place about the timing of the budget and the need for longer term planning to support successful service delivery.

The largest single infrastructure investment in the territory's history is included in this budget, demonstrating our values. This budget delivers a carefully staged investment of \$1.34 billion over the next seven years for the new northside hospital. We are prioritising critical health infrastructure while maintaining a responsible approach to the territory's finances, bringing the government's total commitment to the northside hospital to almost \$1.5 billion over a decade.

Without repeating the budget debate, I would like to highlight the other investments we have made in this budget, including a coordinated package of initiatives in partnership with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, investing across health care, education, housing, cultural projects and governance; additional funding for our community partners to deliver projects that will support climate change mitigation and adaptation; funding for ACT Wildlife, the National Parks Association and Landcare ACT to support community-led initiatives to protect, conserve and enhance the ACT's environment, wildlife and conservation; funding to support four new local shopping centre upgrades at Kingston, Chisholm, Cooleman Court and Kippax to provide better public spaces in the shops; and more firefighters, more paramedics and more staff at the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions. This is a responsible and responsive

budget—a budget that invests in Canberra.

Putting together the budget is a mammoth effort. It is supported by a relatively small number of public servants who have worked incredibly hard this year. I want to acknowledge the role that ACT Treasury has played in putting together everything that is required to support this piece of legislation that is before the Assembly, from briefing material advice, engagement with the community and industry representatives and the budget documents themselves. Their exceptional advice and expertise helps us as we make decisions that will shape our city for generations to come.

An especially big thankyou to the Under Treasurer Russ Campbell, who leads a very capable team, and Michelle Dowdell, Deputy Under Treasurer, on her first ACT budget. Thank you to the rest of the team, especially Scott Austin and Mitch Pirie. The ACT Treasury is a small and dedicated team who are diligent and professional. I would also like to thank our departmental liaison officer Carolina Ross for putting up with us and always keeping us well fed during what has been a very long process. A lot of hard work goes into putting a budget together, with long hours, weekends, two public holidays in this instance, and I am grateful for all of the support provided by Treasury, staff across ministers' offices and my office in particular. I would like to thank Britt Atkins and Kahlia Smith for their work in ERC colleagues' offices. I would also like to mention former Deputy Chief Minister Yvette Berry and her team that played a role in the ERC for the 2026-27 budget. I would also like to thank my Treasury team, including David Ferguson, Chief of Staff; Martin Greenwood; James Eveille; and Will Burfoot, amongst others. On that note, I commend the appropriation bill to the Assembly.

Title agreed to.

Question put:

That the bill be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes: 14

Noes: 7

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Bill agreed to.

Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill 2026-2027

Debate resumed from 10 June 2026, on motion by **Mr Steel**:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (11.27): I rise very briefly on behalf of the Canberra Liberals to support this appropriation and to place on record our thanks to everyone who makes the work of this Assembly possible, especially on the day after the

Assembly's latest sitting day in at least a decade. Much of that work happens behind the scenes. The Clerk and chamber support, Hansard, our committee teams, the Assembly library, HR, finance, IT, security, and Building Services all contribute every day to members on all sides of this chamber being able to do the jobs that Canberrans elected us to do.

We also recognise the importance of the independent officers supported through this appropriation: the Auditor-General, the Electoral Commissioner, the Integrity Commissioner. Strong, properly functioning, independent institutions are an essential part of good government and public confidence in our democracy. In this place we will disagree—sometimes vigorously—about the decisions made in this chamber, but the institution itself and the people who support it deserve our respect and our gratitude. I thank all of those staff for their professionalism, their advice, their patience with many of us and the work that they do for this Assembly and for the people of Canberra. The Canberra Liberals do support this appropriation.

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (11.29): This is a part of the budget debate that often gets forgotten or overlooked, but it is a significant part of what makes the ACT's arrangements uniquely good. On the basis of support for the separation of powers, funding for the offices of the Assembly and for the Assembly itself are provided for in a separate bill—this one—and the Treasurer's preparation of that bill is required to follow some special rules. Officers make representations through the Speaker on their needed appropriations, and if the government disagrees with those recommendations and chooses to enact a different set of budget needs, then the Treasurer needs to explain why. Such an explanation has not been required, partially because the officers are making bids with a mind to the broader available resources of government and partially because the government is respecting these processes. That is all as it should be.

I want to briefly give a shout-out to the Office of the Auditor-General. In November last year the Australasian Council of Auditors General published scores on the independence of such officers throughout its member jurisdictions of the Asia-Pacific. That is all eight Australian states and territories, Australia itself, New Zealand Aotearoa, Fiji and Papua New Guinea. The ACT ranks equal first, with a score of 343, or 90 per cent of the maximum total, alongside Queensland across 60 legislative factors. To cite the report, the arrangements we have through this budget process are:

...unusual in Australia and reflects the heightened respect in the ACT for the principle that the legislature and officers of parliament must have a meaningful level of independence from the executive government.

We agree.

I also, as Mr Cocks did, want to reflect on the Office of the Assembly budget as it pertains to our brilliant attendants, the Office of the Clerk, Hansard, Broadcast and all the other staff who stayed late last night, because they more than earned their keep. Because we politicians could not quite shut up, they were here until 10.30 pm last night, and they did so with grace, aplomb and incredible strength of character.

Changing tack a bit, there is something else we need to talk about. Those paying attention will have noticed an updated security posture for the precinct. A lot of this is

welcome and flows quite appropriately from the recommendations of the security audit of the precinct conducted last year. I will not go into the detail of those recommendations for obvious reasons. Suffice to say, the audit identified vulnerabilities and opportunities for improvement, and action is being taken. What made that audit valuable was not simply that it identified areas for improvement. It recognised that any security measures adopted by the Assembly must be proportionate and consistent with the role of this place as an open and accessible democratic institution. Security matters, and so does the character of the Assembly. It needs to be open and accessible to the public; otherwise, what is the point? For that reason the Greens support the majority of the measures that have been proposed.

However, we continue to have concerns about the decision to introduce armed private security guards into the precinct. The issue is not whether security should be strengthened. The issue is whether this particular measure is necessary, proportionate and supported by appropriate consultation. The audit certainly recommended an uplift in our security workforce capabilities, but it did not recommend a security force equipped with firearms. In fact it suggested that despite any vulnerabilities, the Assembly's overall posture was and is appropriate to its context.

Our understanding is that the Speaker has arranged for new security services provider to be equipped with firearms from November. The Assembly's Protective Security Committee was advised of the decision, but a number of stakeholders feel they were not meaningfully consulted before it was made. Staff have also raised concerns about whether existing workforce consultation obligations were met. We have enterprise agreements that mandate pre-decision consultation for employees on matters affecting their workplace, which were not engaged in.

Equally important is the question of psychological safety. A workplace can be physically secure while still creating psychosocial hazards for some workers and visitors. A number of staff have expressed the view that visible presence of firearms would make them feel less safe, not more safe, particularly people from communities that have experienced state violence, persecution, conflict or overpolicing and who are particularly anxious about firearms being held by persons who are not currently sworn police officers.

We know from recent and international examples that firearms can present an escalation risk in a stand-off situation. In a 2021 study of 133 school shootings in the United States the death rate was found to be more than 2½ times greater when an armed guard was present. In the 2016 attack on the Pulse nightclub, an LGBTIQA+ venue in Florida, armed guards at the scene were unable to prevent serious harm. Closer to home, at Bondi Beach in December armed police already present at the scene of the attack failed to prevent the harm that was caused by a fixated individual. The tragedy of the Bondi attack is particularly worth noting. It gets cited as evidence of an elevated security risk environment. It is important to understand that Bondi demonstrated the current risk we are in. It did not change the level of risk we are living with. I think it is also worth noting that a proposal to arm the community security group for public events, floated by the New South Wales Premier following the Bondi Beach attack, has been opposed by the New South Wales Police leadership and the Police Association.

Assembly staff have also questioned whether less intrusive alternatives have been fully

explored. Many have expressed support for greater investment in behavioural observation, de-escalation capability, incident response training and other measures that strengthen security without changing the fundamental character of the precinct. The Assembly is not an airport, a military facility or a high-security government compound. It is a place where members of the public come to engage with their elected representatives, often at moments of frustration, distress or vulnerability. We should be careful about measures that risk making this institution feel less open, less welcoming and less connected to the community it serves. The cooler heads in the room know that good guys with guns do not do a good job of stopping bad guys with guns. Truly improving security is about promoting a sense of comfort and safety, deeply and culturally.

I want to particularly acknowledge the considerable work of Mr Speaker and the work that he has done to improve security across the precinct and the genuine desire to keep staff, members and visitors safe. However, please understand that the Greens are deeply uncomfortable with this decision to bring weapons into the precinct and to bring in weapons with private security, and we are considering our options. We do not believe the case for that step has yet been clearly made, and we expect there will be further discussion in this place about whether it represents a proportionate response to the risks we face. There will be more to be said in this space as we get into the October sittings and ahead of the commencement of armed security services. For now, I do commend the budget for the Office of the Legislative Assembly.

MR HANSON (Murrumbidgee) (11.36 am): I thank members who have spoken for their kind words, and I certainly endorse what has been said about the hard work of this Assembly. I think that perhaps it is only when I have become Speaker, after nearly 17 years in this place, that I have fully understood the complexities and the difficulties of running a parliament. I was probably part of the problem, to be frank. I have gained a new respect and understanding for our diligent, hardworking OLA staff. It is an amazing job that they do. I would like to thank the government for their support for the budget initiatives that we put forward—the leaking roof, which has been plaguing us for a while, particularly those of us on the top floor. We have never experienced that from the Liberal Party, so we are yet to understand that in detail. There were some fire safety measures that needed to be addressed as well.

With regard to the guarding service, I acknowledge Miss Nuttall's points. She and I and numerous members of her staff have had lots of conversations about this, and I think that it is a point where we will have to agree to disagree. I have sat down with Ms Clay and the Chief of Staff and with Miss Nuttall and others. Let me be very clear: our collective safety, the safety of the members, staff and visitors, is my number one priority. Others may have other priorities, but, from my point of view, keeping us all safe is an absolute priority. The sad reality is that the risk to us as a parliament as members has increased.

I think there are two major components to this. One is the politically motivated violence. I will go to evidence from ASIO on those matters. The other one is the fixated individuals. These are concerns that are raised by members but also by the AFP and ACT Policing. To an extent, regardless of the motive for somebody who may be wishing to do us harm by coming to this place armed or violent, that does not really matter. From my point of view, we need to be able to respond with people who are

properly trained, properly skilled and equipped to respond. The reality is our attendants are not that. I love our attendants; I think we all do. They would be the first to agree that they have not been recruited, trained, equipped or prepared to deal with a violent intruder. The reality is they are on the front line of this. If you speak to the attendants, I think that they are reassured by the fact that there is a security guarding service who can respond immediately if there is a violent or armed intruder.

I have not come to this decision lightly. I have had extensive conversations with the OLA staff and others. The security audit I will go to in a minute, but I just want it noted that that was done pre Bondi and the world has changed. Even before that the previous Speaker had written to the police minister asking for AFP to come into this place—ACT Policing or PSOs—to guard. This is not something that is unique to me. Previous Speakers have sought that solution, be it through AFP or be it through a private security firm.

The audit did, though, say that we need to strengthen our guarding services, and they said we can either do it by upskilling all the attendants or by an external guarding service. In that report they did say—there is an observation:

Attendants do not receive any formal security training or hold relevant security qualifications, meaning capability and behavioural observation, de-escalation and incident response is limited.

I formed the view that trying to equip our attendants to do that job is inappropriate. Certainly, if you look up on the hill when you go to the federal parliament, you have got AFP externally who are armed. You have then got an attendant concierge-type service, and then internally you have got AFP armed again.

I met with the Chief Police Officer and the minister. I thank the minister for facilitating that, and I have written to the minister. I have made no secret that I, similar to the previous Speaker, requested ACT Policing or PSOs to perform that role. The minister wrote back and expressed support for a guarding service but said it was going to be best provided by private security rather than by AFP. That was her decision, I guess, not mine.

There is no doubt that when you speak to AFP, when you speak to members, there has been an increase in the number of threats. A survey of MLAs last year showed, in my view, that far too many MLAs have been experiencing some form of threatening behaviour—that is unacceptable. This has included threats of physical violence, sexual violence and death threats, and we have just got to be aware of that.

I have gone with staff of the Assembly and had a briefing from ASIO. I understand there is an ASIO briefing available for members as well should they wish to partake in that that is upcoming. Just from an open-sourcing point of view, the 2025 annual threat assessment—the threat assessment made by the director-general every year—warned that the risk of politically motivated violence was, in his words, already flashing red and expected to remain elevated until 2030. The threat assessment from this year said:

... politically motivated violence—which incorporates terrorism—remains an acute concern ... I am gravely concerned by its temperature and trajectory.

There was recent media reporting that the director-general had on the anniversary of the 9/11 attacks revealed that ASIO had disrupted 16 potential terrorism cases in the nine months since the Bondi terrorist attack in December last year. He said that it is in some ways more difficult than 25 years ago. Mr Burgess said that while his organisation kept the terror threat at probable, this does not tell the full story and that acts of politically motivated violence are becoming more likely than probable suggests. Indeed in the media I saw yesterday someone had been arrested for allegedly pushing ISIS mass casualty events in Australia.

Just quoting from recent media—open sourcing again—there is a *Guardian* article by Tom McIlroy, who used to work here, for those who have been around for a while. He now works for the *Guardian*. The quote is:

The rising tide of threats faced by members of parliament, their staff and families here has been described as the most dangerous security environment in decades.

There have been recent convictions lately and charges laid about people in our region. On 17 August a Canberra worker was fined \$2,750 for an online threat to a politician and charged with weapons possession.

Other parliaments—we have looked at the example there. All of them have a guarding service in one form or another, either provided by private security or by their police. Certainly, I was over in WA recently at their parliament, and they have that there. There was a threat that was made against their parliament recently—a threat of violence against their parliament. Only two do not have an armed service, and that is a decision for them. I would acknowledge the fact that each parliament is going to make its own decision. We do have a very open area at our front. If you go to WA parliament, it is floor-to-ceiling bulletproof glass. It is a very different scenario. We simply do not have that here. We have got to be aware of our unique situation.

I do take on the point about barriers to access. I am not blind to that. We want to remain open. We encourage that. I think we are a very open parliament, and I do not think any of us wish to make decisions that would be a barrier to that. I think that our new guarding service—they have been here a little while now—are very friendly and very professional. I am of the view that if they have got a sidearm, that is not going to be a restriction to barriers to access to democracy. If others have a different view, I guess that is for them to have, but my priority has to be safety.

In terms of engagement, the Assembly Protective Security Committee, which has members of staff from all parties, has been engaged on this issue. I raised these issues at the admin and procedure committee some time ago—that I was seeking to do this and actually provided a copy of the letter that I provided to the minister. I have exchanged letters with the Greens whip and the Chief of Staff. I have met with the leader of the Greens. I appeared before the expenditure review committee—that was fun—and before the Select Committee on Estimates, and this issue was raised and discussed. There was an all-staff briefing that was conducted on 7 September where all staff were invited, and unions were present and invited to ask questions. I have discussed this with numerous individuals.

What I would say is that my view is that this has been very positively received. One of

the responses I have received is, “I can’t believe that we have not got this already.” That seems to be a bit of a response from a number of people. I accept there are mixed views, but I have to put my hand on my heart and make sure I am fulfilling my responsibilities to make sure that this is a safe place for everybody and that we take the necessary measures, and I believe I have done so.

Thank you all for your support of the OLA staff. I acknowledge the difficult job that we all have in here. In doing so I think acknowledging that the OLA staff support us so well as they do, and I think everybody recognises that. On their behalf, thanks for all of that kind acknowledgement.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Bill agreed to in principle.

Leave granted to dispense with the detail stage.

Bill agreed to.

Domestic Violence Agencies Amendment Bill 2026

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

Title read by Clerk.

MS TOUGH (Brindabella—Minister for Human Rights, Minister for Community Services, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Women, Seniors and Veterans, and Minister for the Prevention of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence) (11.47): I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

I am pleased to present this bill to the Assembly this morning. Before I begin I would like to acknowledge the many victim-survivors of domestic, family and sexual violence in our community. This bill builds on important reforms already undertaken in this Assembly to strengthen responses to domestic and family violence in the ACT. It is at its core about strengthening our response to better protect victim-survivors, to prevent further harm and to ensure that our systems work together to support those who need it most.

In 2024 the Assembly passed the Domestic Violence Agencies (Information Sharing) Amendment Act 2024. This act introduced a domestic and family violence information-sharing scheme in the territory and created a legislative framework that clearly authorises information-sharing between prescribed information-sharing entities where necessary to establish, assess, prevent, reduce and manage the risk of domestic and family violence. The overarching objectives of the scheme are to improve service responses to domestic and family violence; promote the safety, protection and wellbeing of victim-survivors; prevent the occurrence and escalation of violence; and hold persons of concern to account. At all times it centres the safety and protection of victim-survivors.

In 2025 the Legislative Assembly passed the Domestic Violence Agencies (Information Sharing) Amendment Bill 2025 to delay the automatic commencement of the DFV information-sharing scheme for 18 months to November 2026. This additional time has been essential in allowing the government to deliver the foundational elements required to support the successful implementation of the scheme. The bill passed in 2025 recognised that these essential elements were not yet in place to support implementation by May this year. It acknowledged that meaningful system reform and the cultural change that underpins it take time.

Since the passage of the 2025 amendment act, we have delivered a targeted and staged program of work to ensure the scheme is supported by the necessary systems, capability and guidance upon commencement. We have progressed significant work to establish the office of the information-sharing coordinator, a critical role responsible for overseeing the scheme and facilitating information sharing between prescribed entities. We have also undertaken extensive consultation to refine and deliver the key supports that underpin the statutory framework. This has included the development and finalisation of the ministerial protocol, which provides clear guidance to information-sharing entities on how the scheme operates in practice.

In addition, the ACT Domestic and Family Violence Risk Assessment and Management Framework has been updated to align with emerging evidence, including the development of new tools to support frontline workers to consistently assess and respond to DFV risk. Centralised training has also been developed alongside prescribed agencies, and delivery of this training has begun. This will ensure that information-sharing entities understand their roles, responsibilities and obligations under the scheme. By taking the time to properly establish these foundations, we are ensuring that the scheme is ready to operate effectively from commencement, strengthening both system capability and, most importantly, outcomes for victim-survivors.

Throughout the delivery of this work the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Office within the Health and Community Services Directorate has continued to convene and chair a regular working group that brings together representatives from various ACT government directorates that are prescribed information-sharing entities. This working group has been a key governance body since 2022 and has continued to provide strategic oversight to the development of the foundational elements of scheme implementation.

In consultations with those government stakeholders and with sector stakeholders we heard that there was a need to make legislative amendments that clarify and mitigate information-sharing risks and correct or simplify the practical operation of the scheme ahead of its commencement. This bill is an important opportunity to review and refine the legislative framework to ensure that the scheme operates as intended in practice without unnecessary barriers to effective information sharing.

The bill specifically responds to the breadth of feedback and input of prescribed agencies and other stakeholders. All amendments have been carefully considered and informed by extensive stakeholder consultation, including with key non-government organisations such as the Domestic Violence Crisis Service, Toora and the Canberra

Rape Crisis Centre. While many of these amendments are minor, technical or clarifying in nature, some reflect more substantive reform, consistent with the original intent of the information-sharing scheme.

Several stakeholders identified a risk that the current scheme's legislation may fragment existing information-sharing pathways, including between government entities and the key non-government organisations. Those information-sharing pathways include current legislative powers used by the Family Violence Safety Action Program, FVSAP, and the wraparound support program. Both of these programs currently operate under various interacting laws and include members who are not currently information-sharing entities in the new scheme. This bill directly mitigates the creation of unintended information silos that could impede system responses and jeopardise victim-survivor safety. This bill ensures that information sharing to entities outside of the scheme is possible where it is necessary for an entity's exercise of lawful, government-authorised powers and functions.

Importantly, this bill does not weaken any safeguarding mechanisms under the scheme. For example, the information-sharing coordinator will have oversight of any information sharing for a secondary purpose, such as in an FVSAP or wraparound meeting. We acknowledge that the act's consistency with human rights relies on any scope for secondary use or disclosure being narrowly confined and safeguarded. Recognising that this scheme creates the opportunity for more information to be shared across the DFV service system, there may be an increased number of agencies who will hold information about victim-survivors that they have received second-hand. This circumstance creates additional opportunities for people who use violence to engage in systems abuse by seeking to subpoena victim-survivor records from various sources other than those organisations that provide services to victim-survivors. It is a known and material risk that people using violence may use legal processes to gain access to victim-survivor's sensitive information to control, threaten or harass the victim. I see an unacceptable level of risk to the safety of victim-survivors if we do not address this.

This bill introduces a procedural safeguard which seeks to reduce the opportunity of using a subpoena process to enact harm by ensuring that only the appropriate entity produces the information. The effect of this will be that an entity is not required to disclose information it has received under the DFVISS. These amendments do not prevent the production of the material itself, and the approach taken was developed in collaboration with the several key stakeholders, including the ACT courts and tribunals.

I also wish to talk to an amendment being progressed in this bill which has been informed by the ACT's Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Strategy that the former Minister for the Prevention of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence tabled in May. The bill formalises the dissolution of the Domestic Violence Prevention Council. A legislative approach to governance for the domestic, family and sexual violence system has not provided the flexibility required to adapt and respond effectively to the evolving and complex DFSV landscape. The limitations of the DVPC were acknowledged through consultations undertaken to inform development of the strategy.

The strategy and the actions committed to in the first action plan are the product of extensive consultation with victim-survivors; the domestic, family and sexual violence sector; Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations; and other community

organisations and government agencies. We are committed to strengthening local governance in a way that reflects the national context and that will drive greater system integration and cross-agency accountability.

In the 2026-27 budget \$939,000 in funding was announced to support a refreshed system governance model that supports strategy outcomes 5 and 2. Of this, \$815,000 over three years to 2028-29 has been allocated to establish a DFSV sector network to support advocacy, coordination and workforce development for DFSV services. \$124,000 has been provided to support the DFSV Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Reference Group, a working group reporting to the DVPC, to be elevated to directly advise the minister.

I acknowledge that effective refreshing of governance arrangements takes not only resourcing, but time. Accordingly, the amendment to repeal the DVPC will not take effect immediately. The bill provides a delayed commencement for up to six months or sooner through written notice provided by me, as responsible minister, pending the formalisation of new governance arrangements. Ensuring that adequate governance arrangements are in place prior to the repeal amendments is a priority and will be delivered under the first action plan of the DFSV strategy.

In closing, I would like to acknowledge and thank all of the government and sector stakeholders that gave their time and considered thought to inform the development of this bill and the broader work to prepare the scheme. It is clear that there is strong community support for information sharing related to domestic and family violence risk and achieving better outcomes for victim-survivors. The feedback and recommendations we received from stakeholders throughout the development of this bill have been and will continue to be critical to the scheme's operation. I would like to acknowledge the hardworking frontline workers who everyday support people and families impacted by domestic and family violence. Your determination, dedication and compassion for victim-survivors does not go unnoticed. We hope that this bill will support you to undertake your vital work providing much-needed assistance to victim-survivors and their families.

Finally, and most importantly, I acknowledge the bravery of victims and victim-survivors who live with the impacts of domestic and family violence. Your wisdom of lived experience helps us understand how the system can be improved. May this bill represent another piece of the ACT government's commitment and responsibility to protecting and supporting people currently at risk of harm or who have experienced and survived domestic and family violence. We must ensure that future generations do not experience this. I commend this bill to the Assembly.

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

Property Developers Legislation Amendment Bill 2026

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

Title read by Clerk.

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage, and Minister for Sport and Recreation) (12. 00):
I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

I am pleased to present the Property Developers Legislation Amendment Bill 2026 to the Assembly. It makes amendments to the Property Developers Act 2024 and the associated legislation that delivers the Property Developer Licensing and Regulation Scheme.

The amendments proposed in the bill directly respond to implementation feedback from key stakeholders, government and industry about the operation of the scheme, and will streamline and simplify licensing and regulatory approaches, whilst maintaining the fundamental principle of consumer protection.

As Australia’s first and only property developer licensing scheme, it is important that we continue to monitor implementation to ensure we have an effective regulatory scheme.

There are a series of minor and technical amendments, as well as three more substantial changes to streamline and improve the operation of the scheme.

The first substantive amendment will allow a single property developer licence to be “attached” to a project. When licensing becomes mandatory on 1 October this year, it will require a licence to be held by the person or entity that is undertaking a residential building project with three or more dwellings.

The licence touchpoints are: applying for a development approval under the Planning Act 2023; applying for a building approval and a certificate of occupancy under the Building Act 2004; and selling residential dwellings off the plan under the Civil Law (Sale of Residential Property) Act 2003. The strength of this approach is that it aligns licensing requirements to well established, existing legislative requirements in the development and construction process, and ensures that a suitably licensed person is responsible for the project at all times.

For many development projects, different entities can come together to progress a development. This can mean that different entities trigger the licence requirement, with the potential for multiple licences to be needed to progress a single project. This is particularly the case for small-scale “missing middle” developments, as well as for large and complex projects such as Special Purpose Vehicles—SPVs—or Joint Ventures, JVs.

For small-scale missing middle projects of three or more dwellings, the Property Developers Act requires the owner of the land to hold a property developer licence. This is appropriate where a property developer purchases an existing residential property with the intention of redeveloping it and constructing three or more dwellings.

In many instances, however, this type of development will take place on land owned by people who did not purchase it with the intention of redevelopment. Rather, it may have

been their home or an investment property.

A likely development model in these circumstances will be for the landowner, being a homeowner or “mum and dad” developer, to enter into an agreement with a builder or developer. The landowner’s role in the development process will be largely passive, with the development partner arranging all aspects of the project from design, construction and marketing. In such circumstances, it is appropriate for the person making these arrangements to be the licence holder.

Likewise, for some large and complex projects, it may be appropriate for the newly created joint venture or special purpose vehicle to be the licence holder throughout a project.

To achieve a streamlined licensing process, with the ability to hold one licence to progress a development project, the bill amends the Building Act 2004, the Planning Act 2023, and the Civil Law (Sale of Residential Property) Act 2003, to provide that the person “arranging for” the building work to be carried out must hold the licence.

This will allow a single property developer to be licensed, and to use that licence to satisfy the different touchpoints where a licence is required, even where there are different people or entities doing things that trigger the requirement to hold a licence.

This will not reduce regulatory accountability, as the licence must be held by the person arranging the work, but will simplify the licensing process for some projects. Importantly, this will not change the ability for the regulator to pursue regulatory action against a range of parties who may have been involved, or profited from, the development activity.

The second substantive amendment in the bill will broaden the approval criteria for rating entities. One of the scheme’s novel inclusions is the ability for the government to approve a rating entity to provide rating reports on prospective licence applicants, to support consideration of whether a property developer is suitable to hold a licence.

Section 27(2) of the Property Developers Act specifies that for a rating entity to be approved under the act, it must hold an Australian financial services licence, or AFSL. An AFSL is issued by ASIC and authorises the licence holder to provide certain types of financial services. These include providing financial product advice and dealing in financial products.

The effect of having an AFSL being a mandatory requirement to be approved as a rating entity under the Property Developers Act is that it may exclude some assessment entities that are otherwise well qualified and would meet the other requirements that section 27 of the act prescribes for rating entities to be approved.

The bill inserts a regulation making power in section 27 of the Property Developers Act, which allows the government to make a regulation prescribing alternative qualifications for prospective rating entities.

The government intends to develop a regulation that will make sure that rating entities are appropriately qualified and accountable. This amendment will support a broader

market of service providers who could provide ratings reports to support the licensing application process.

The third substantive change that this bill makes to the scheme is to further embed and incentivise the uptake of latent defect insurance, or LDI. LDI is an insurance product that builders or developers can obtain on behalf of future building owners. It is a first resort insurance product and allows the owners of completed buildings to make a claim as soon as a building defect is identified.

Following approval of a claim, the insurer arranges for rectification work to be undertaken. The insurer may then choose to commence civil action against the developer, builder, subcontractors or consultants to recover costs associated with the rectification work.

An important consumer protection element of LDI coverage is that neither the building owners nor the government need to establish who is responsible for a defect before rectification work commences. This does not prevent regulatory action being taken against a builder or developer.

To manage future claims liabilities, LDI providers engage a technical inspection service, or TIS, to review designs and inspect works during construction, helping ensure the building is free of serious defects prior to the policy being issued to the new building owner.

The TIS approach is broader in scope and deeper in detail than a standard building certification process. In combination, the TIS and the first resort insurance cover provided by an LDI policy further reduce the likelihood of serious defects and ensure prompt rectification. These are significant consumer protection outcomes.

To incentivise uptake of LDI in the ACT, this bill amends section 52 of the act so that individual director liability for serious defects will not apply if a compliant LDI policy has been taken out by the developer on behalf of the future building owners.

If this amendment is supported by the Assembly, the government will progress a regulation that will prescribe requirements for compliant LDI products. This will include minimum requirements for insurance coverage to ensure strong consumer protection and confirm that developers and insurers are required to share relevant information with the Construction Occupations Registrar. The government will consult with owners corporation, resident and industry stakeholders as work progresses.

This work will be aligned with other jurisdictions to support a consistent and mature insurance market. For example, this year, both the New South Wales and the Victorian governments have introduced legislation to incentivise the uptake of LDI products in residential construction projects.

While this amendment will allow a developer to choose whether to take out an LDI policy or be subject to the personal liability provisions, we think that developers will choose the LDI pathway based on feedback we have received from the market. We will monitor this carefully, and the government may move to mandate LDI for these larger residential property developments in the future.

Mr Speaker, Canberrans should rightly expect quality homes, built by a capable and accountable construction industry. The Property Developer Licensing and Regulation Scheme targets residential development because that is where the biggest consumer risk lies. These buildings are where people live, and they represent the biggest financial investment most people make. The ACT government is absolutely committed to the scheme and its consumer protection objectives.

The changes outlined today are sensible improvements informed by implementation feedback from industry, which will streamline processes whilst maintaining strong consumer protection objectives. I commend the bill to the Assembly.

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

Building and Construction Legislation Amendment Bill 2026

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

Title read by Clerk.

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage, and Minister for Sport and Recreation) (12.11): I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

I am pleased to present the Building and Construction Legislation Amendment Bill 2026 to the Assembly. This bill delivers the second tranche of building reforms under the ACT's Construction Productivity Agenda.

On 18 March 2025, the ACT Legislative Assembly passed a resolution which called on the government to strengthen its engagement with the building and construction sector, and the community, to identify ways to streamline approval processes.

Following the release of the National Competition Policy, which recognises the critical role of housing and construction in driving economic growth, I announced a housing and construction productivity agenda for the territory that supports industry capability, streamlines regulatory processes and fosters innovation across the sector.

Since then, the government has been focussing on delivering building reforms that reduce and remove unnecessary regulatory barriers and simplify building regulations and processes. These reforms seek to enable faster delivery of housing without significantly compromising safety, structural integrity or building performance.

This Construction Productivity Agenda and associated building quality reforms are just one of the ways the government is delivering on our commitment to enable 30,000 homes by 2030.

The bill amends several components of the ACT's building regulatory system to

strengthen and modernise the regulatory framework by reducing unnecessary regulatory burden and supporting a more efficient, resilient and sustainable construction sector.

Specifically, the bill will amend the Building Act 2004; the Building (General) Regulation 2008; the Construction Occupations (Licensing) Act 2004; and the Construction Occupations (Licensing) Regulation 2004. The bill seeks to amend existing provisions under the Building Act to allow substantially completed buildings with an expired building approval to be granted a new building approval that allows construction to be completed under the same version of the National Construction Code that the initial building approval was granted. This new type of building approval will be valid for one year.

To support this, the bill will also introduce a new Certificate of Partial Completion to ensure the building work already completed was lawfully done and that the partially completed dwelling is suitable to be finished. This amendment would allow eligible buildings that were lawfully approved and largely constructed, to be completed as per the original building approval, without imposing significant upgrades and structural changes that could otherwise be required under a new version of the National Construction Code. This can avoid significant redesign costs, reordering of critical building materials and further delays to construction completion.

Many of the incomplete projects that have expired building approvals occurred because the initial builder could not complete the job. This new partial completion certificate should make it more attractive for a new builder and the certifier to take on the incomplete project and the associated risk and complete the work for the landowner.

Mr Speaker, the bill also introduces an amendment to the Building (General) Regulation to introduce a building approval exemption for the installation of photovoltaic panels and solar water heaters on commercial and multi-unit developments. The proposed amendment would introduce more consistency in regulations, regardless of building class, and remove barriers to the timely and cost-effective installation of renewable energy systems on commercial and multi-unit buildings, which often present some of the greatest opportunities for large-scale solar energy generation.

This amendment will also enable faster and cheaper delivery of renewable energy infrastructure without compromising safety, structural integrity or building performance. We estimate that this will typically deliver up-front savings through building owners not having to engage a builder or building certifier.

Finally, the bill includes an amendment to the Construction Occupations (Licensing) Act to allow the Construction Occupations Registrar to offer a construction licence class other than the licence that is seeking to be renewed. This amendment would reduce regulatory, administrative and cost burdens, preventing the construction practitioner from paying the fees associated with a new application and the registrar from having to deny a licence application and having to assess an application for a new licence.

As this amendment is proposed to be a reviewable decision, in line with other decisions relating to license decisions, the bill also includes a consequential amendment to the Construction Occupations (Licensing) Regulation. This amendment supports

procedural fairness by ensuring licensees can seek review of decisions that affect the class of licence they are authorised to hold.

These proposed amendments to the ACT's building regulatory system will provide significant benefits, including improved building outcomes for Canberrans, by providing more flexibility in approval pathways, while reducing regulatory and administrative burdens. This will support landowners and businesses to complete building projects without compromising safety and quality outcomes. The building reforms delivered by this bill will support a market that attracts investment and builds trust among consumers. I commend the bill to the Assembly.

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

ACT Ambulance Service—staffing

Ministerial statement

DR PATERSON (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services, and Minister for Gaming Reform) (12.17): I rise today to provide an important update on the ACT Ambulance Service, the challenges facing our workforce and the work the ACT government is undertaking to ensure Canberrans continue to receive high-quality emergency care that they rely on. This includes supporting the wellbeing of our paramedics and ambulance staff, strengthening workforce sustainability and making the investments needed to meet the growing needs of our community.

Before I do that, I want to acknowledge the people at the heart of this service. Every day, ACT Ambulance Service personnel respond to some of the most difficult and confronting situations in our community. Our paramedics, communications officers, patient transport officers, educators, operational managers, call takers and enabling staff provide care, professionalism and compassion when Canberrans need it most. Their work saves lives, supports families and helps keep our community safe.

The ACT Ambulance Service is experiencing record demand. During 2025-26, ACTAS answered almost 75,000 triple zero emergency calls, representing an increase of more than 11 per cent compared with the previous financial year. This reflects trends we are seeing across Australia and internationally, with ambulance services responding to growing and increasingly complex demand. Despite these pressures, ACTAS continues to deliver some of the strongest response times in the country for life-threatening emergencies and maintains high levels of community satisfaction. This is a testament to their professionalism, skill and dedication.

As our city continues to grow, it is critical that we support the people who provide these services. The wellbeing of our ambulance workforce and the safety of our community are closely connected. To provide the best possible care, we need a workforce that is well supported, appropriately resourced and able to work safely and sustainably.

Over the past year, concerns have been raised about staffing levels, overtime, fatigue, leave access and roster pressures within ACTAS. These are important issues, and I want to be clear that the ACT government is proactively engaged to work with the workforce through these issues. We acknowledge these challenges and recognise the impact that

sustained operational pressures can have on workers and the service itself.

Like many emergency services around the world, ACTAS is operating in a challenging environment. Demand continues to grow while ambulance services everywhere compete for a limited workforce. There will be occasions when unexpected absences, unplanned leave or workforce shortages create pressure on our roster. When this happens, ACTAS has established arrangements in place to maintain service delivery and ensure the safety of the community remains the highest priority. ACTAS also works closely with other emergency services across the Emergency Services Agency to manage operational challenges and support service continuity.

In April 2024, ACTAS introduced a new 44-hour operational roster to replace the previous 10/14 roster arrangement. This change was undertaken in response to growing demand, the need for better coverage during peak periods and feedback from staff about fatigue management, professional development and work-life balance.

Importantly, the new roster puts more ambulances on the road during peak periods than the previous arrangement. This recognises that the number ambulances available to respond when demand is highest is a more meaningful measure of service capacity than the number of stations from which they operate. The roster uses a four-shift-on, four-shift-off pattern, comprising one 10-hour morning shift, one 12-hour day shift, one 12-hour afternoon shift and one 10-hour night shift. Because these shifts overlap, it requires more paramedics than the previous 10/14 arrangement.

Implementing significant workforce reform in a frontline emergency service is never simple. The government recognised that additional staffing would be required to support this challenge and has invested accordingly. Funding provided through recent budgets has delivered additional paramedic positions and operational support roles, with further recruitment continuing as part of our long-term workforce strategy.

I had a fantastic meeting with some of our amazing paramedics just recently, discussing returning to work after having children and the challenges they faced juggling shift work and a young family. I will take these insights onboard.

We made a commitment to review the new roster after its first year of operation, which we released in November last year. The ACTAS Roster Review found that many paramedics were highly supportive of the roster model. At the same time, it recognised that ongoing workforce shortages and increasing service demand were impacting its effectiveness.

These findings helped inform the ACT Ambulance Service Workforce Strategy 2026-2029, which I tabled in the Assembly earlier this year. The strategy sets out practical actions focused on improving roster sustainability, strengthening leave and wellbeing arrangements, increasing recruitment and retention, and enhancing governance and workforce planning. This work is grounded in evidence and focused on outcomes. It aims to reduce reliance on overtime, improve access to leave, strengthen workforce wellbeing, build education and training capacity, and ensure ACTAS is equipped to manage future demand.

Demand growth remains one of the biggest challenges facing our service. As I said

earlier, demand has grown and increased over the past decade by more than 70 per cent. Canberra's population is growing, our community is changing, and people are increasingly relying on ambulance services for complex health needs. We must ensure the service is prepared not only for today's demands but for the Canberra of the future.

The voices of staff, the union, Assembly members and the community have all contributed to shaping this work. Constructive feedback and accountability help us build stronger services, and those perspectives have informed both the workforce strategy and the government's investment decisions.

A key priority for the government is expanding the ACTAS workforce. We know that recruiting additional paramedics is essential to building a sustainable service. At the same time, we recognise that services across Australia are all working to recruit from the same limited workforce pool.

What makes Canberra an attractive place to work is not only our city and lifestyle but the quality of our ambulance service and workforce. We have highly skilled paramedics, a strong organisational culture and a commitment to supporting our people throughout their careers. These are strengths we will continue to build on.

Supporting workforce wellbeing goes beyond recruitment. Earlier this year ACTAS launched an innovative simulation training facility designed to prepare paramedics for complex real-world situations, including occupational violence and aggression. The facility also supports recovery and return-to-work programs, providing another practical investment in staff safety and wellbeing.

To every member of our ACT Ambulance Service, I want to say thank you. Your work is valued, your concerns are being heard, and this government remains highly committed to providing the people, the training, the equipment and the organisational support that you need to perform your role safely and effectively.

And to the Canberra community, I want to provide reassurance that when you call triple zero in an emergency, highly skilled professionals will continue to be there when you need them.

Our responsibility is to ensure the ACT Ambulance Service remains strong, sustainable and capable of meeting the needs of our growing community, both now and into the future. The ACT government will continue to support our ambulance workforce, continue to act on the evidence, continue to invest in workforce capacity and wellbeing, and continue to strengthen the services that Canberrans rely on. That is our commitment to the people who serve our community and to the community they so proudly protect.

I present the following paper:

ACT Ambulance Service—Workforce, wellbeing and service sustainability —
Ministerial statement, 24 September 2026.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (12.26): I would like to thank the minister for the statement, and I would like to extend my appreciation to everyone who works in the ACT Ambulance Service in the service of their community in extremely challenging situations.

It is clear from the statement that the government is grappling with the scale of the problem of increased demand that we are experiencing. It is encouraging that the government is recognising the importance and value of our paramedics and the associated ambulance workforce.

However, I do want to stress that actions speak louder than words. The best statement of intent and support will mean nothing if it is not followed up by tangible actions and improvements to meet that demand from the community. For a lot of people in the ACT Ambulance workforce, the struggle is real, and the whistle is being blown.

I truly want this situation to improve, and I want the government to succeed in this matter. I hope the minister can appreciate my role here on the crossbench is to call out when the government is not able to meet the demand and to ensure there is a plan on how we address this. My request for the government is: please deliver.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Sitting suspended from 12.27 to 2.00 pm.

Questions without notice

Economy—Building and construction

MR PARTON: My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, CRT Building Products in Mitchell informed industry this week that, although they are continuing to operate as a business, they will cease manufacturing trusses and frames for the construction industry, which is something that they have done continuously since 1964. In their email to suppliers, their managing director has blamed the changing market conditions in the residential construction space in Canberra. The closure of this component of their business coincides with the release of the Property Council Confidence Survey, which sees industry sentiment in the ACT sitting at the frighteningly low level of 55, which is down from 85 index points in June—the lowest level in the Property Council’s survey history. Chief Minister, your government remains publicly committed to delivering 30,000 new homes by 2030, but you are already 1,500 behind schedule. At what point will you concede that the 30,000 target is pure spin and that there is not a snowball’s chance in hell of achieving it?

MR BARR: Happy birthday to the Leader of the Opposition. I am pleased to see that turning 60 has changed his outlook on the world and that he is presenting cheery and optimistic questions about the future of the city! There were many elements in Mr Parton’s question. Perhaps I will correct a couple of the statements that he has made. In relation to the housing supply target—the 30,000 houses by the end of 2030—some have interpreted that to be by the beginning of 2030 when, in fact, it is by the end, and that makes quite a difference to the achievability of the target. The ACT is, in fact, one of the best performing jurisdictions in the country, in relation to the other housing

supply target—the one that we signed up to in partnership with the commonwealth government that runs to 2029. Being on track for that means we are largely on track for the 30,000 target by the end of 2030.

MR PARTON: Chief Minister, why is industry sentiment in the ACT so much worse than every other jurisdiction, and will you take responsibility for slowing our new home supply chain to a trickle?

MR BARR: I do not believe that is the case. Obviously, there is a pipeline as it relates to the housing supply continuum. One needs to look back at development application lodgements, approvals, building approvals, commencements and then completions to get a sense that it is indeed a pipeline and that there will be periods in the housing supply continuum—for example, there may be a large multi-unit project in a particular month or a particular quarter—when our numbers can shift. What the market has generally produced is somewhere between 3,000 and 6,000 new dwellings a year, depending on the particular fiscal year. An increasing factor in the housing supply will be projects funded through the Housing Australia Future Fund and delivered by community housing providers and partners. There is, of course, also the government's own public housing building program. They are contributors to supply as well. To the extent that current interest rates might mean the residential market is somewhat more subdued, there are factors that are driving demand, and that includes the increase in funding available for public and community housing projects, and also the very significant increase in the first home buyer share of the housing market.

MRS MORRIS: Chief Minister, how can you possibly deliver 30,000 homes by 2030—not by 2031—when you are already 1½ thousand homes behind schedule? Industry confidence is at a historic low and a longstanding Canberra construction company will cease manufacturing trusses and frames for housing.

MR BARR: Housing construction methodology continues to evolve. There is quite a push across the nation now for more modular housing construction and there are new factories being set up to support that. There is the distinction that Mrs Morris draws. It is important that our commitment—30,000 extra by the end of 2030—

Mrs Morris: So you mean by 3031, then?

MR BARR: No—I mean by 31 December 2030.

Mr Parton: You're shifting it already.

MR BARR: No—I have been saying this on multiple occasions—dozens of occasions.

Mr Parton: Is it December 2028? Which one are we going with?

MR BARR: The end of 2030 is the target, and, given we deliver somewhere between 3,000 and 6000 each year, depending on the supply cycles, we will comfortably pass that mark by the end of 2030.

Economy—building and construction

MRS MORRIS: My question is to the Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development. Minister, residential construction in the ACT is in crisis. We are seeing a growing number of firms from the region choosing to focus entirely on interstate projects. They cite bureaucratic red tape in planning, the urban forest changes, the developer licensing laws combined with the federal Labor budget changes and interest rate rises. When Project Coordination went into administration in 2024 their chairman, Paul Murphy, said: “The economic and regulatory environment that faces Canberra building companies is more challenging today than the recessions of the 80s and 90s and global financial crisis.” According to the Property Council and MBA, it is much worse now and confidence is at an all-time low. Minister, why has your government crushed our residential construction sector?

MR STEEL: We haven’t—and, to correct the claims by the Canberra Liberals, we have actually seen some strong signs in the building and construction industry. We have seen a change throughout the year in the number of approvals, going up by 17 per cent, and the value of approvals going up by 22.3 per cent, which is higher than across the country. So there are very strong signs here. Of course, as part of our commitment to enabling 30,000 new homes—

Members interjecting—

MR STEEL: It is not just a target. By the way, we are on track to meet our share of the National Housing Target by 103 per cent of it over the target period according to the Housing Supply and Affordability Council. But the targets are not the only policy that we have brought to this Assembly this term. We have also brought to the Assembly a commitment to skills investment, which you just voted against in the budget; a commitment to abolishing stamp duty for first home buyers, which you just voted against in the budget; and a commitment to provide in the budget stamp duty reductions and abolition for those who are purchasing unit-titled homes off the plan, which you just voted against in the budget. We brought a plan for investment in non-market housing, regardless of the cycles of the market and investment in a pipeline of public, community and affordable housing. We have done that in the budget, with 450 new homes through a new public housing pipeline that you voted against.

Members interjecting—

MR STEEL: Houses that probably do need trusses to be installed in them. There is absolutely no doubt that, at the moment, the war in Iran is having an effect on the construction industry.

MRS MORRIS: Minister will anyone be left to build the missing middle or will it simply remain missing?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question. It will certainly remain missing if the opposition keep on voting against measures that support it. We have been very clear—

Mr Cocks: Mr Speaker, on a point of order: the minister has simply launched into debating the Canberra Liberals’ position. He should respond directly to the question

about his own.

MR STEEL: Mr Speaker, to be fair—I haven't finished the answer.

MR SPEAKER: Regardless, you cannot spend time attacking the opposition and debating the question and then ask a question at the end. So I would ask you to turn to answering the question.

MR STEEL: We are seeing very strong signs that people are taking up the missing middle housing reforms since they came into force from 1 July. That is being supported by the measures that we took in the budget, including a 50 per cent reduction to the codified LVC for projects in RZ1 and RZ2 areas. I introduced a bill this morning, as part of the ACT government's construction productivity agenda, which is one tranche of a piece of work that we are doing to streamline approvals and streamline building and regulatory processes so that we can see more homes built more quickly. They are not sexy reforms but they are important and they cumulatively make a difference.

Mr Cocks: On a point of order, Mr Speaker, on relevance: the question was about business survivability rather than the regulatory settings for people who wish to build a home but the businesses providing the services.

MR STEEL: Mr Speaker, the whole premise of the question was about government regulation affecting business survival.

MR SPEAKER: I do not think there is a point of order, Mr Cocks. Mr Parton, is this a supplementary?

MR PARTON: It is indeed. Minister, when will you concede that the 30,000 dwellings by—I do not know—midday on Boxing Day 2030 target is a complete fantasy?

MR STEEL: It isn't. It is made up of a few things. It is made up of a strong housing supply pipeline through government land releases. It is made up of planning reforms. We have already introduced the missing middle housing reforms and now we are moving on the work on transit-oriented development, shop adjacent housing and a range of other forms of housing supply across the city. It is also made up of direct investment in public and community housing. Those things combined enable 30,000 homes, and we expect to see them move from planning approval through to investment, construction commencement and then completion. That is work that we are doing.

The reason that we had an ambitious target that we brought to the election is because we care about housing. Those opposite continue to criticise that. They have no plan and no target, and they voted against the biggest housing budget in the ACT's history.

Building and construction—property developer licensing scheme

MR PARTON: My question is to the minister for planning, regarding developer licensing. The Property Council have kind of welcomed your pathetic backdown on developer licensing legislation—

Mr Barr: A point of order, Mr Speaker.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Barr?

Mr Barr: Questions cannot contain imputations like that.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Parton, you cannot use that sort of pejorative language in your question.

MR PARTON: Let me start again. The Property Council today kind of welcomed your backdown on developer licensing legislation, which moves to incentivise developers to take up insurance to protect them against your own legislation. This ultimately further increases the cost of every dwelling—from the MBA press release, which was not as kind.

The Property Council media release today states:

We're pleased the Government has listened to us, but let's be clear—when you've pushed an industry off the edge of a cliff, providing a parachute is better than nothing, but it would have been far better not to push it off in the first place.

Has the government got it all wrong with developer licensing? And if not, why the last-minute move to limit the damage to the industry and increase the cost of every single dwelling?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. The community has had a gutful of dodgy development in this city, and we will always stand on the side of consumers—of the community—who are buying homes, to make sure they are protected. And as we supply more homes and enable 30,000 new homes in the city, it is critical that they are well built. That is why the property developer licensing scheme is so important and why we are strengthening it with legislation that I have introduced today: to strengthen consumer confidence that when consumers are buying a home it does not have defects, and if there are defects that arise, they can have them addressed quickly through a new insurance product that was not available in the Australian market up until recently. It is being used already by developers, which is great to see in the ACT. It is being taken up in a broader market in New South Wales, and we are working on a transition to that. There is a cost in taking out insurance, but it is far lower than the high cost of addressing defects when they occur.

It is not in the community's interest to have a homebuyer buying a home—the largest largest investment they will ever make—and then having to pay tens of thousands or hundreds of thousands to address defects in that building. Enough is enough. We have put in place a property developer licensing scheme that protects consumers, and it is clear that the opposition does not support the community or consumers.

MR PARTON: Has this legislation, despite the fact that it has not even been enabled yet, contributed to the ACT being the worst jurisdiction in the nation in construction-industry business confidence, and has it contributed to the slowdown in residential construction?

MR STEEL: I do not believe it has. There is a whole range of factors, including a war in the Middle East that have seen the cost of construction materials rise above 50 per cent since COVID-19. That has had a big impact on the economics of building here in the territory, and right around the country and the world. There is a range of different factors, including increased interest rates in a high inflation environment—again caused by the war in the Middle East—that have made it very difficult in the building construction industry at the moment.

But the industry is very supportive of our productivity agenda, which is supporting them to build more homes more quickly in the territory. They are very supportive of the extra investment we made in the budget in non-market housing. They are very supportive of the planning reforms to enable more housing within existing residential areas and commercial areas in Canberra.

We will continue to work on that, but it comes with this social contract: that as we enable the construction industry and the property developers and members of the Property Council to build more through the reforms that we are putting in place, those new residential buildings must be well built. We do not accept anything else. We are putting in reforms that are sensible to support consumers and that are practical for industry, and that is what we have introduced today.

MR MILLIGAN: How many local business firms have given an indication, either publicly or to the government, that they will no longer be constructing anything in the ACT and will, rather, focus their entire business in regional New South Wales?

MR STEEL: I am not aware of any specific firm. I have been very clear: we do not want dodgy developers in the territory; we do not want them here. We do not want them here, and consumers do not want to buy a unit in a development that is riddled with defects that then costs them tens or hundreds of thousands to repair—and have owners corporations running around spending money on lawyers in costly legal action that is protracted over years. Enough is enough.

We will hold property developers accountable for their projects—for the work that they do—through this licensing scheme. The measures that we have put in place today will help to streamline the scheme. It will help to further protect consumers through a new product that was not available before, when we introduced the scheme. It will give an option to those in the property construction market, if they want to take it up and avoid having their directors being individually liable for the defects.

They can choose at the moment, but we are looking at whether we want to make it that mandatory in the future, just like New South Wales is. Other jurisdictions are moving, and we are moving too, and the only people that are being left behind are the Canberra Liberals who do not support consumers.

Libraries ACT—opening hours

MS CLAY: My question is to the minister for city services. Minister, earlier this year I raised accessibility concerns about Belconnen library on behalf of local resident Rohan Goyne, including a missing section of handrail on the access ramp. I understand that additional railing has now been installed, but poor wayfinding remains unresolved

and it is therefore still inaccessible for Mr Goyne.

He has therefore been going to Kippax library but, since the government has closed it on Saturdays, Mr Goyne is now left without any local alternative. He has lodged a complaint with the ACT Human Rights Commission, which is under current investigation on the basis that the Kippax Saturday closure amounts to indirect discrimination—including because the decision was made without consultation with library users. Minister, before deciding to close Kippax library on Saturdays, what assessment did the government undertake of how this decision would affect access to library services for people with a disability?

MS CHEYNE: Clearly, the Liberals had fun over lunch. Mr Speaker! I appreciate that this is a serious matter for Mr Goyne, and, as I have pointed out both publicly and elsewhere, I have written to Mr Goyne seeking a meeting with him—because he certainly has strong views about me that he is happy to communicate. And I appreciate that he is certainly in contact with Ms Clay and perhaps through this answer she is able to convey also that I am very happy to meet with him, if that message is somehow not getting through.

Mr Speaker, it is difficult for me to answer this question due to how it is being framed, because Belconnen library is accessible. It is accessible to people who have a disability that relates to mobility.

Ms Clay: Point of order. 118AA on relevance: the question was, “Before deciding to close Kippax library on Saturdays, what assessment did government undertake of how the decision would affect access to library services for people with a disability?” We are hearing about Rohan Goyne of Belconnen. The question is: what assessment did the government undertake?

MR SPEAKER: On the point of order, I do not think it is a 118AA but I would accept that relevance, Minister, is about the analysis that was conducted and if there was any. So, if you could turn to that?

MS CHEYNE: Sure, Mr Speaker. Well, the fact is that we do have a library in the Belconnen region open on a Saturday, that is accessible. And so, we did look, of course, across all of our libraries and what the offering was. And Ms Clay well knows that in the overall assessment—I have run out of time.

MS CLAY: Minister, have you spoken to any people with disability who use libraries regularly, to understand how the loss of local library hours will affect their lives?

MS CHEYNE: I have responded to every single person who has written to me—say, for the period recently when I was on leave—and there are several people who have indicated that they have a disability. And certainly, we have been able to work through what they have put to me, including finding other options for them that perhaps do not give them the identical access that they had, but certainly means they still have a significant amount of access. And I have received some really lovely feedback about that, Mr Speaker. And so, the short answer to Ms Clay’s question is, “Yes.”

MISS NUTTALL: Minister, why is the onus on people with a disability for raising

issues of inaccessible public spaces, rather than the government ensuring that accessibility for people with a disability is always a central consideration for opening hours of public spaces like libraries?

MS CHEYNE: Well, it is not, Mr Speaker. The government actively considers how our public spaces are accessible. There are some things that can be overlooked. There are some things where we do appreciate hearing from the public. But we are a human rights jurisdiction and that means that we need to apply our Human Rights Act to all of our public decisions, and that includes ensuring that we are providing access to our public facilities in a way that does not restrict people arbitrarily.

Gaming—political donations—Canberra Labor Club

MR EMERSON: My question is to the Minister for Gaming Reform. You said on ABC Radio last week that the Labor Party has not accepted donations from the Labor Club in over a decade now, but in the last 10 years ACT Labor has received \$109,878 worth of free facilities use and other gifts in kind from the Canberra Labor Club which are considered donations under our electoral laws. Minister, do you accept that you misled listeners?

DR PATERSON: I will accept that. I meant cash donations.

MR EMERSON: Minister, do you accept that ACT Labor continues to benefit financially from the Canberra Labor Club, having received \$14,281 in free facilities use last financial year alone, and noting the Electoral Commission's evidence to the inquiry into my bill seeking to ban political donations from the gambling industry that free facilities use is currently treated as a gift for the purposes of part 14 of the Electoral Act?

DR PATERSON: I accept that the Labor Party receives a gift in kind from the Labor Club in free venue hire. Other parties do also receive gifts in kind for venue room use as well. I would also like to point out that all this information—while I made that statement and I meant a cash donation—is publicly available information on the Elections ACT website. As I reiterate every time I talk about this, any member of the public can go to the Elections ACT website and they can access the Labor Party financial records, the Labor Club financial records and the 1973 foundation financial records. So it is all, for well over a decade, available for public access.

MS CARRICK: Minister, do you accept there is a conflict of interest in being the Minister for Gaming Reform and the member of a political party that continues to receive donations from a gaming machine licensee?

DR PATERSON: No, I do not accept that. As I have said to the Canberra Liberals, I am the Minister for Gaming Reform and my focus is on reducing gambling harm and that applies across the board to venues that have poker machine authorisations as well as other forms of gambling across the ACT. I also have particular concern around online gambling as well. I think Mr Emerson made very clear in the public hearings that he did not have a conflict of interest even though he took a \$5,000 donation from a club manager during an election campaign, and apparently his bill was evidence that he is not conflicted. I introduced the strongest self-exclusion legislation to the Assembly last

week. So I think that is—if we are going by equal standards—evidence that I am not conflicted.

Land—community facilities

MS CARRICK: My question is to the Minister for Multicultural Affairs. Minister, social connection is critical to all communities, and access to meeting and event spaces are needed to foster those connections so that communities can support each other. Yet when community organisations seek land to establish facilities, the primary pathways available are direct sales and competitive market value land sales processes. This process is difficult for many multicultural and community groups. As a result, communities can spend years searching for a suitable site despite having a demonstrated need and a willingness to contribute to a facility.

Minister, does the government accept that relying primarily on direct sales and market value community facility zoned land sales disadvantages many multicultural and community organisations that have a genuine need for community facility but that may not have the financial capacity to purchase land at market value, and if not, why not?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question and certainly, we recognise the interest that many—

Mr Cain: Well, you are not multicultural affairs.

Members interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Yes. No, that is good. Carry on.

MR STEEL: I am the minister responsible for community zoned land in the territory and the expressions of interest process, which have been running recently for blocks of community facilities zoned land in the territory. And we certainly acknowledge that there is strong interest from the multicultural community, particularly religious groups in establishing places of religious worship or broader multicultural multipurpose facilities on new land in the territory.

And that is why we have a fair process through a two stage process with an expression of interest for sites that are identified through the land release program for those communities to come forward and there is a merits based process to assess their application and part of the process, particularly in the second stage, looks at financial capacity to be able to fund a new facility. And that is critical because unfortunately in the territory in the past, we have seen land provided to community groups, but then they have not had the financial capacity to actually build something on the site.

And in some cases—and I speak to the classic one because I was in primary school when the land was gifted to a Hindu organisation next to Torrens Primary School, where I went to school. That is still being completed now, and it is a long time ago since I was in primary school! So we do have to ensure that there is that financial capacity. We believe that there are organisations that do have financial support and backing to not only purchase the land, which is at a reduced value because community facilities land does not allow a whole range of uses. It is quite restrictive and we think there will be

strong support. *(Time expired.)*

MS CARRICK: Minister, what options does the government provide for multicultural communities seeking a permanent place to gather if they are unable to purchase land through direct sale or the community facility zone land sales process?

MR STEEL: Yes, well, that is something that we work with those multicultural communities on. I have met with many of them over recent years and as the former Multicultural Affairs Minister, we encourage them to engage with Places and Spaces in Infrastructure Canberra to look at whether there is an existing government property that they might be able to utilise. I also encourage them to speak to other community sector organisations, including religious organisations that often have large land holdings in the ACT, about whether they can potentially purchase those often to build something or indeed, use their existing facilities in higher arrangements.

And I had the benefit of going to one of our great local religious communities on the weekend, the St Alphonsa Syro Malabar community and they of course utilise the Catholic Church's premises in Holder. They do not have their own but they are looking for something. So they have something in the interim, but there may be a range of opportunities for them. There are very, of course, long waiting lists for the government facilities that we do have in Places and Spaces and so that is why it is important that they look at elsewhere, private opportunities around the territory as well.

MR EMERSON: Minister, is the government developing other pathways to support multicultural and other community organisations to access suitable land for community facilities?

MR STEEL: What we are looking at doing is undertaking planning supported by the budget that was just passed in the previous budget to identify more land for community facilities. As my colleagues and cabinet knows, this is something I raise every single time the Suburban Land Agency comes in, as well as engagement on the Housing Supply and Land Release Program, which I am now responsible for.

So this is this is a big priority for us. It is in my statement of planning priorities and we are looking at undertaking the due diligence work necessary before then bringing on parcels of land onto the Housing Supply and Land Release Program and then being released through the two stage process for community facilities land release and the expression of interest process that I outlined earlier.

So a lot of that work is happening at the moment, but the reality is in a city that is growing, land is becoming more scarce to release on the program, not just for community facilities, but for residential and for a whole range of other uses as well. And so we have to be smart about how we do that and that is why in the guidelines for the two stage process that we have, we try to encourage those applicants coming forward to use their sites for multi for a multipurpose facility where they can potentially have other groups come in and use that facility in addition to themselves.

Foundational Supports and Thriving Kids

MISS NUTTALL: My question is to the Minister for Disability, Autism and

Neurodiversity. Minister, following ministerial statements last week, you indicated that access to the ACT's \$90 million for Foundational Supports, which was provisioned in the 2024-25 ACT budget, is dependent upon national cabinet decisions. Minister, why must the spending of ACT ratepayers' money be contingent upon the approval of governments outside the ACT?

MS ORR: In answer to Miss Nuttall's question, the allocation and the provision of the money that has been put into the central provision for Foundational Supports is a decision of the ACT government in line with interjurisdictional agreements that we have made for these services. I do not agree with the association that Miss Nuttall is drawing with that, but the commonwealth now determines how that money is spent. I think that is a very simplistic view to take on what is very common practice between the commonwealth and state and territory governments—to have intergovernmental agreements that say, "We will undertake these commitments and we will provide a certain amount of funding to do that." The actual commitments, the programs and the services themselves, are still subject to future decisions of government—hence, we are not allocating funds to those services yet—but the overall intent remains the same. It was a decision of the ACT government to enter into this joint agreement with the commonwealth.

MISS NUTTALL: Minister, when the ACT government committed to this \$90 million for Foundational Supports, did it advise disability organisations and the disability community that access to those funds would be subject to future national cabinet decisions? If they were, when were they first informed?

MS ORR: I was not the minister at the time, so I could not say conclusively what discussions were had and with whom at a particular moment. In going to the broader point within the question, as to whether people were aware that the funding that was put aside would be subject to future decisions, I think you could take it as an assumption that people would be commonly aware it was part of an intergovernmental agreement, and these intergovernmental agreements require having an agreement before proceeding. I am not quite sure of the intent of Miss Nuttall's question. I think this is a pretty standard practice in intergovernmental agreements between jurisdictions and it should be pretty evident.

MS CLAY: Minister, will you publicly commit to disclosing when money from the \$90 million has been spent?

MS ORR: The budget papers outline where that money is provisioned and what has been allocated for what purpose. Again, I would point every member of this place to the budget papers and the commitments that we have made in this year's budget for Thriving Kids, which is a portion of the Foundational Supports that have been agreed. There are agreements in place through the signing of the bilateral agreement with the commonwealth, and it will be progressively rolled out from 1 October. We have put funding in this budget to start on that work and on the progressive rollout of Foundational Supports, and it is all very clearly within the budget papers.

Housing—homelessness

MR CAIN: Mr Speaker, my question is to the Minister for Housing. Minister, many

Canberrans are concerned by the growing number of people who are visibly experiencing homelessness in our city and the homeless camps appearing in areas of high foot traffic.

Given that the Minister for City and Government Services refused to accept criticism for the emergence of homeless camps, including those in Veterans Park—because, and I quote, “some people want to do different things with their lives or behave in a particular way,”—Minister, is it the government's position that homeless people in Canberra are choosing to be homeless?

MS ORR: I reject the characterisation of the paraphrasing that Mr Cain has put forward.

Ms Lee: It's a direct quote!

Ms Cheyne: It is a very selective quote, Mr Speaker!

Mr Cain: Point of order, Mr Speaker. I would love the minister to clarify exactly what mischaracterisation there is in my question.

MR SPEAKER: Well, there may be a point of order on relevance, but she has had about 12 seconds. So let's let the minister continue, mindful of her being relevant.

MS ORR: With the interjection, hopefully I am remembering the question now and I do stay relevant—

Mr Parton interjecting—

MS ORR: Mr Speaker, in responding to this particular proposition, as put, I think the point that my colleague was going to and, and what I think a number of the people in this place have gone to is, is that homelessness and the reasons that people end up homeless are very complex. There are a lot of different factors that contribute to it. While we walk past these camps, while we see these camps within our community—and none of us like being confronted by homelessness—we all want to see people helped out of homelessness. People do have autonomy over their life and their decisions, and we cannot force them to accept our help

Ms Lee: So yes.

Mr Cain: So, yes, it's their choice.

MS ORR: No, it is not a yes. I can hear the interjections and I know we are not meant to respond to them, but it is not a yes. There is a nuance and a subtlety here that the opposition is not reflecting, and that is that we cannot force people to accept help. Does that mean that they choose to live in circumstances that we as a society do not deem acceptable and that they themselves might not see acceptable? The answer is no, but in working that through we do need to be respectful that they are people, they have decisions to make and they have to be comfortable with the decisions that that they do make. That is part of the journey out of homelessness and that is what we do in wrapping around supports, in providing that person centred care.

MR CAIN: Minister, is it the government's position that a tent is a home for the purposes of the right to housing?

MS ORR: I do think that question is bordering on giving a legal opinion in interpreting the right to—

Mr Cain: No, I'm asking: what's your opinion?

Ms Lee interjecting—

MS ORR: What I would say, if the government—

Ms Stephen-Smith: Point of order, Mr Speaker. Mr Cain has just clarified that his question was seeking an expression of opinion, which is an out-of-order question.

MR SPEAKER: Well, he said in his question—

Mr Cain: Just answer the question. Just answer the question.

Opposition members interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: "Is it the government's position that a tent is a home?"

Ms Lee interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: I would encourage the opposition not to interject and ministers not to listen to the interjections.

Minister?

Opposition members interjecting—

MS ORR: Mr Speaker, I am happy to happy to follow your lead as best as possible, noting I am getting a lot of interjection shouted at me.

Certainly, the government recognises that we would like to have everyone in housing. That is why we have the targets and the ambition we have to grow housing across the ACT. In recognising and achieving that target, we know that there are some people within our community who are very vulnerable who are experiencing homelessness, and helping them to realise housing is not just as straightforward as necessarily building a house and forcing them into it. That is why we have the pathway out of homelessness. We work with our community partners., and we work with services to build up those relationships with people who are experiencing homelessness to wraparound support to them and to help them move from homelessness to housing.

And that is what we have been doing. We have made significant investments in this most recent budget to our homelessness services as well as our housing. And we will continue to work at what is a very complicated social challenge for everyone, including us, but one that we are committed to and will continue to work towards resolving.

Mr Cocks: Point of order, Mr Speaker, under standing order 118AA. The question was actually about the government's classification of housing and whether a tent meets the classification of a home.

Ms Cheyne interjecting—

Ms Orr: On the point of order, the question that was put was linked to the right to housing, and that would require, in my opinion or my view, a legal interpretation as to what the right to housing does or does not cover.

MR SPEAKER: I think on the point of order, the question specifically says "Is it the government's position that a tent is a home." I do not think it was a broader question. I will review the *Hansard* because there seems to be a dispute on what the question exactly was, but I think there was a specific question in there and the position was sort of broad in her position that did not go into that point. So I will look at the *Hansard* and get back to you.

MR PARTON: Minister, when will you live up to your noble rhetoric and provide stable housing and lifestyle support to homeless Canberrans?

MS ORR: Mr Speaker, the ACT government is living up to what Mr Parton has characterised as rhetoric.

Mr Parton interjecting—

MS ORR: Again, I will point you to the funding that we have put in this budget, quite a significant amount of funding. I would also draw the opposition's attention to all my previous comments as to how this is a complex issue. Trying to simplify this down to question that goes to, "If you do XY and Z, you'll solve the problem," is not actually recognising the nuance and the challenges that are there, and the commitment that this government has to making sure it is a person centred response.

Economy—business

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the minister for business.

Minister, ABS data shows that the survival rate for ACT businesses has plummeted from 86 per cent in 2023 to less than 60 per cent in 2026. Startups in particular are struggling, with the survival rate for new entrants falling from 77 per cent to less than half. What is causing so many local businesses to fail?

MR PETTERSSON: I thank Ms Castley for the question and her continued interest in the business portfolio. Canberra is a dynamic place to be in business, Mr Speaker. We have always had a particularly high business growth rate.

Mr Parton interjecting—

MR PETTERSSON: Now the Canberra Liberals would like to talk down our economy, but the fact—

Mr Cocks: Point of order, Mr Speaker. I believe the minister is debating the question—

MR PETTERSSON: I was responding to an interjection, Mr Speaker.

MR SPEAKER: I just asked ministers not to do that in answering questions. If you could be directly relevant and not debate the question and ignore the interjections. I will be reminding the opposition not to be making interjections.

MR PETTERSSON: Thank you, Mr Speaker, and I appreciate your service in this place in keeping the Canberra Liberals' interjections to a minimum!

Canberra has always been a dynamic place to be in business, Mr Speaker, and that is because we have always had an extraordinarily high business growth rate. In June of 2022, there were 33,811 businesses in the ACT. In June 2026 there are 37,785. That is a growth rate of 2.8 per cent, which is the third highest in the country. We do an extraordinarily good job here in the ACT of supporting innovation. I acknowledge, however, the underlying points in Ms Castley's question that here in the ACT we do sometimes see a bit of turnover. To be succinct in answering her question, I would attribute that to the fact that the ACT has a particularly high concentration of small professional services as well as hospitality, both industries which are prone to turnover.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, what are the government's main policies to address the problem of local business failure, and when will they improve survival rates?

MR PETTERSSON: I thank Ms Castley. The government does want to see business succeed and thrive here in the ACT. Within my business portfolio, I am very proud to support the Canberra Business Advice and Support Service. This is an important service that provides support to businesses in navigating potentially challenging circumstances.

I think though, more important for business, they want to see a local thriving economy. They want customers coming in the door. That is something that we as a government are committed to, which drives our economic development agenda. We are not, however, immune from greater circumstances which can shape the economic circumstances of the territory. The decisions of the Commonwealth government, decisions of foreign governments and conflicts on the other side of the world can also impact business confidence.

MR MILLIGAN: What has the government actually done to help support businesses to keep their doors open, as compared to the ABS data suggesting that we have a huge closure rate here in the ACT?

MR PETTERSSON: I thank Mr Milligan for the question and his continued interest in the portfolio, as well.

Mr Parton: He's very interested!

Mr Milligan: Hear, hear!

MR PETTERSSON: I know this is a particular passion of his. First, I will refer him to my first answer to Ms Castley—that we also need to look at the business growth rate

here in the ACT, which shows we have a growing business community.

In terms of specific initiatives, I have been very proud in this portfolio to be responsive to the local economic conditions. The government in responding to uncertainty in recent times sought to delay the expansion of portable long service leave. We also will of course continue to support the economy. In my other portfolios, I am very keen to address the workforce needs of growing industries here in the ACT, through the skills portfolio. Other portfolios will continue to support what our growing economy needs.

ACT Human Rights Commission—complaints process

MS VASSAROTTI: My question is to the Minister for Human Rights. Minister, a constituent has reported to me that it took the Human Rights Commission five months to contact her after she lodged a complaint regarding safe pedestrian access for a person living with a disability. It then took a further four months to process the complaint. The complaint was against the City and Environment Directorate, which declined to participate in conciliation. The commission subsequently closed the complaint, noting that "conciliation would be unlikely to succeed in resolving" the complainant's concerns.

Minister, what is the average timeframe for resolving complaints through the Human Rights Commission? And do we know how many complaints have been made against ACT government directorates over the past five years? What confidence can Canberrans have that the complaints process will lead to meaningful outcomes?

MS TOUGH: I thank Ms Vassarotti for the questions and her ongoing interest and commitment to human rights here in the ACT. I will take on notice the specific details on the average time of complaints and the number of complaints that have been against government entities. I do not have those specific numbers in front of me.

But I would say I appreciate you raising that concern from that constituent. To me, that sounds like a long time for someone to wait. So, I will investigate further.

I would say our Human Rights Commission are an incredible group of people; an incredible statutory authority doing great work for the people in our community. And I think they work really really well with our community and across government agencies to support people when they have complaints against government agencies, and other complaints about human rights. And it is important that they are supported, and that people in the community know that they are there and available. I work closely with all the commissioners to understand what they are hearing from the community and what they need, to support them to do that work.

MS VASSAROTTI: The CED discouraged conciliation on the basis that accessibility concerns were beyond the practical scope of this individual complaint. Does the ACT government expect people living with a disability, and their families and carers to lodge individual complaints for every inaccessible street and footpath across Canberra, before systemic accessibility issues can be addressed?

MS CHEYNE: No, certainly not. And, I welcome having a further conversation with Ms Vassarotti on this specific matter. I appreciate that Ms Tough will come back with

the specifics about the Human Rights Commission. I am sorry that it even got to that point but, without knowing the specifics of this matter, I cannot comment further—but I am keen to see if there is a way that it can be possibly resolved.

MR BRADDOCK: I believe my supplementary will land back with the Minister for Human Rights. Minister, does the ACT government consider the closure of a complaint without conciliation, without a remedy and without any commitment to improve accessibility, to be a success of its human rights framework?

MS TOUGH: I thank Mr Braddock for the question. As part of the complaints process for the Human Rights Commission, we are exploring ways which will provide a pathway to take human rights complaints to ACAT, where they have not been resolved with the Human Rights Commission process—and expanding those pathways for where complaints go, once they go through the Human Rights Commission. It is really important that people who make complaints are able to take them to the full extent possible and have those complaints heard. And the government is committed to working through what that process looks like into the future.

Energy—gas

MR BRADDOCK: My question is to the Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water. Minister, I keep hearing concerns about the electrical network's capacity and capability to support electrification. Minister, what work is the government undertaking to ensure Evoenergy network plans are aligned with the government's electrification goals both up to, and past, 2029?

MS ORR: I thank the member for his question. Evoenergy is a joint venture between Icon Water and their joint venture partner has a pass through relationship to the government which we can scrutinise through our being a shareholder of Icon Water. A lot of the discussion that my joint shareholder and I do take is making sure that we are representing the interests of the Canberra people to have a reliable source of electricity provided to them.

In answer to Mr Braddock's question as to what are we doing to ensure there is, as part of the transition I believe is what he was getting to, a reliable source of electricity there for Canberrans, the electricity network is regulated on a national level through the national regulators. Every five years energy providers and distributors, such as Evo, have to put forward their plan for what they will be doing with their infrastructure to make sure they are meeting the demands of the community and doing that in a financially prudent way that does not put an unfair cost on consumers for delivering that electricity. Evoenergy has been submitting those five year plans, has been having them reviewed and endorsed by the regulators, and has been implementing them. Certainly, we will continue to, through our regulatory and through our shareholder responsibilities, make sure they are keeping to what they are doing.

In submitting those plans, one of the things the regulators do look at is that Evo has considered the needs of the community, including the needs that would go along with transitioning to electricity, the growth of the population, changing weather patterns and a range of considerations. They approve those plans having formed the view that what Evo has put forward in their network planning will maintain a reliable provision of

electricity and energy to Canberrans, and again, do so in a way that is financially prudent and not—(*Time expired.*)

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, what contingency plan is in place if electrification and gas decommissioning occurs faster than forecast and electricity demand exceeds current planning assumptions?

MS ORR: Again, I would point the member to the regulatory system that is in place to assess the plans. The planning for network capacity and provision that is in place is not only for electricity, it does have to be submitted also for gas networks. These are all questions that do get asked as part of those considerations. We have just recently had, in the last little period of time, the most recent gas determination, which did look quite a lot at the decommissioning of the gas network in the ACT as part of the transition process. These are all questions that the network operator, Evo, has to look at and respond to in doing their planning and doing it in a way that meets the obligations they have under the regulatory system.

MS VASSAROTTI: Minister, what power do you have to direct Evoenergy to build the network needed to meet the government's electrification goals?

MS ORR: I feel like I have just been asked to give the answer to the homework so the crossbench can now hold me accountable to doing this to their will—that aside is said a little bit tongue in cheek and a little bit joking.

There are a number of powers available to make sure network operators are meeting the planning that they have said they would do. It is quite an exhaustive list and not necessarily every single power will sit with me. We have regulators of utilities here in the ACT, which is not a ministerial role. It is actually put to a non-political party to be the utilities regulator. We have the relationship through the shareholder agreement as I have already mentioned, plus there is a number of regulators that sit across the national energy market. Going to the substance of the question, which was around government policy, the government has set the policy. We have set that expectation out to our energy providers as reflected within our laws and regulations and the obligations that we have, and providers have an obligation to be consistent with the law and with the requirements placed on them.

Public schools—funding

MS LEE: My question is to the Minister for Education. Minister, reporting in the *Canberra Times* this morning revealed that your own directorate established a crisis management team to deal with the fallout from changes to school budgets. An internal directorate document warns, “Where student supports are changed or decreased, this could lead to escalated student behaviour resulting in increased incidents of occupational violence.” Minister, when were you first aware that your directorate was planning for an increase in incidents of occupational violence as a result of your school budget cuts?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Ms Lee for the question, because it is an important opportunity to clarify that that is not what the directorate is planning for. This is a document that is a risk assessment. A risk assessment, by definition, identifies risk and

then identifies measures to mitigate that risk. It is not an effective risk assessment if it does not go through and identify any potential risk that could foreseeably eventuate and then consider what to do to address that risk. There is a foreseeable risk that, should changes to budgets result in changes that would increase the risk of occupational violence, that risk would need to be mitigated.

Ms Lee: Point of order, Mr Speaker: I asked a very specific question about when she became aware that the directorate was preparing for increased incidents of occupational violence. I ask her to be direct.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: When I became aware of something that was not happening?

MR SPEAKER: You have been responsive and relevant, but I think that, as the question is directed to when you become aware of this, perhaps there is an issue. I think Ms Lee seems to be after a timeline if you are able to provide one.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I have received a copy of the risk assessment. I believe it was late last week. I will check the date and respond at the end of question time. But I would reiterate that I have never been advised that the directorate is preparing for this eventuality to occur, because what they are preparing for is to assess all risk associated with this process. It is a new way of doing budgeting. There is a new budget process, and this is a demonstration that the directorate was aware that there were going to be challenges in this process and it was planning for those eventualities. That is what responsible public servants do.

Mr Cocks: On a point of order, Mr Speaker, under standing order 118AA. The question was in fact—and I want to get the words right—“Minister, when were you first aware that your directorate was planning for an increase in incidents of occupational”—that budget cuts could increase occupational violence, not preparing to occur but the possibility that they could occur.

MR SPEAKER: I think there is a different characterisation of what is happening. Ms Lee has characterised it one way and the minister has another. But then, in terms of when she became aware of it, regardless of how it is expressed, she said, “late last week”. I think she has been responsive and she has been relevant, but there is a disagreement, I guess, in the way that it has been viewed. But that is not necessarily a point of order. Supplementary, Ms Lee?

MS LEE: Yes, Mr Speaker. Minister, has your directorate established a crisis management team to deal with increased incidents of occupational violence, as identified in the risk assessment planning? It is a very straightforward question.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: No, Mr Speaker. That is an absolutely incorrect description of what has occurred. I can confirm that I received a copy of the school budget implementation risk assessment on Tuesday, 15 September—so a little over a week ago. It did identify that a structure that is known in the Education Directorate as a crisis management team—because that is the way that they bring together people across the directorate—has been established to work through to ensure that every relevant part of the directorate and their skills are being brought to bear in managing the implementation of the 2027 budget process. The crisis management team is a governance structure and

is not specifically related to the one risk that was identified that Ms Lee has been talking about—among a number of other risks that were identified in the risk assessment. The crisis management team is not related to that one risk.

MR PARTON: Minister, why did you proceed with budget decisions that could put teachers and frontline school staff at greater risk, if your directorate knew that reducing student supports as result of the school budget cuts would increase occupational violence?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I refer the Opposition Leader to my previous answers. This is a complete and utter mischaracterization of what is a standard process for risk assessment, using the ACT Insurance Agency's risk assessment framework. What the Education Directorate has more recently done is establish a time-limited crisis management team and implementation management team structure to reflect the scale, complexity and compressed implementation timeframe associated with delivering the 2027 school budgets. This structure enables coordinated executive oversight, timely decision-making, risk management—including all of the many risks that are associated with a new, complex process that has not been done before—and consistent support to schools throughout implementation.

Again, I want to assure schools, parents, carer and teachers and staff across our school system that this is an iterative process and the Education Directorate is working very hard to support schools. I was really pleased to receive advice from my office that a specialist school board chair called the office today and wanted to pass on thanks for the communications that I delivered yesterday to clarify and correct the correct in relation to cuts to specialist school funding that Ms Lee continued to insist were occurring despite multiple assurances that that was not the case.

Public schools—funding

MS LEE: My question is to the Minister for Education. Your directorate's internal document on the risk assessments warned that principles could suffer stress, anxiety and conflict as they communicated changes, including staffing impacts, to their school communities. You, twice in answers today, have talked about multiple risks. Minister, what are those other risks, aside from increased occupational violence? And, knowing that your own directorate had identified those risks, how are you fulfilling your duty of care to principals who are being left to manage the consequences of your decisions?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: There are, as I said, multiple risks. There are risks of conflict in the discussions. There are risks to Education Directorate staff as well as principals and other school staff, because these are challenging conversations. There are risks of psychological injury associated with the way that these conversations are held. There are risks of stress, anxiety and fatigue, decreased productivity, relationship breakdowns and conflict, high turnover, poor trust—and media has been identified as a risk. I think the opposition's commentary has not specifically been identified as a risk, but it clearly is a risk. It presents a risk of psychological injury to our schools—our teachers, our principals and our school communities, including school boards and P&Cs, which are continuing to receive incorrect information from those opposite, creating the risk of anxiety and psychological injury.

Mr Cocks: Mr Speaker, on a point of order: I would ask for your guidance because the minister has just asserted that the words of the opposition are actually harmful. I would suggest that is probably unparliamentary.

MR SPEAKER: I ask the minister to be directly relevant to the answer. The question that she was asked was about the risks that were presented to her, not necessarily free-ranging about the impact the opposition's words might have. I ask her to be relevant to the question, which I think was in two parts. She seems to have answered one part, but may be turning to the other part now.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: The hazard is maintaining stakeholder and community relationships, and media has been identified as a risk. The opposition has not, but probably should have been.

MS LEE: Minister, why was your directorate creating a risk assessment plan only last week when principals were given their indicative budgets back in August?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: That is not the case. The risk assessment—

Ms Lee: You literally just said that.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: No—I said I received it. Open your ears.

MR SPEAKER: Ms Lee, could you dial down the interjections, and, Minister, could you refer your comments to me and ignore Ms Lee.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I apologise, Mr Speaker. I withdraw. This is a risk assessment that has been updated. You can see that it was originally written to go through each phase of the process, starting from July. A version was dated 10 September and was sent to the union, and that was the version that I received last week.

MRS MORRIS: Minister, do you accept that leaving principals to deliver difficult staffing decisions while you publicly deny there are cuts represents a failure in your duty of care to those school leaders?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I recognise that this has been a very difficult time for principals. It has not been made any easier by the behaviour of those opposite, but I—

Mr Cocks: Mr Speaker, on a point of order: you have asked ministers on multiple occasions during this question time to stick to answering questions and to cease referring to—

MR SPEAKER: There is a point of order. I accept that. Minister, so that we do not have to go further, could I ask you to answer the question and not debate it and spend time on critiquing the opposition's position? I ask that you be directly relevant.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I am happy to do that, Mr Speaker. In fact, I was about to say that, for my part, I absolutely accept responsibility for anything that I have said that has caused distress for principals. But, in this particular context, I am not the only person

who should be taking responsibility. It is directly relevant to the questions that I have been asked about risk assessment and the risk of psychological injury that all of us in this place consider how we have behaved in this matter and whether we are providing supportive commentary to our school leaders or whether we are intentionally misleading our school leaders, school boards and P&Cs in relation to this matter. I have sought to be up-front. I recognise that I said the other day in this place that there were no cuts. I was referring to the budget overall for the Education Directorate, which has seen an increase in budgeted FTEs between 2025-26 and 2026-27, and that is a factual statement. I have also said repeatedly that some schools will be challenged by this process.

Public schools—funding

MS LEE: My question is to the Minister for Education. Minister, reporting in the *Canberra Times* shows the ACT's four specialist schools face almost \$10 million in budget reductions. Yesterday, in question time you claimed those schools would receive an additional \$7 million in funding, but you refused to explain how the remaining \$3 million shortfall would be addressed. You said, "No specialist school will receive less funding in 2027 than in 2026." You also pushed out a video statement last night saying that specialist schools would not receive a single cent less next year. I ask you again: if these schools are to receive a funding cut of almost \$10 million—and you have stated publicly that they have \$7 million of additional funding—how is the shortfall going to be made up? Where is that almost \$3 million coming from?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: What I said yesterday was that we had allocated an additional \$7 million to ensure that no specialist school received a reduction in funding. I also said that no specialist school will receive a reduction in funding. That does not mean that the only source of additional support for specialist schools is that \$7 million; it means that we recognised upfront that there would be challenges in using the student resource allocation model for specialist schools. We recognised that upfront and we allocated additional resources. There is also an exceptions process. There is an overall budget, and I will yet again reassure specialist school communities that there will be no reduction in funding for any specialist school between 2026 and 2007. Ms Lee can keep beating this drum and continuing to contribute to the psychological injury for our school communities, but I will continue to—

Ms Lee: Point of order, Mr Speaker. You have asked repeatedly for the minister not to engage in that kind of debate and she continues to do so, wilfully ignoring your rules.

Mr Cocks: Mr Speaker, I would also suggest that you consider whether the minister is also embarking on personal reflections and again whether it is fact parliamentary to suggest that another member is causing injuries.

MR SPEAKER: On the point of order, Minister, I think it is important that the member can asked a question without that question being used essentially as a characterisation in the answer.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I withdraw, Mr Speaker.

MR SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister.

MS LEE: Minister, are the figures contained in the *Canberra Times* which show a cut of almost \$10 million for the four specialist schools wrong?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I will take the question on notice, because I will have to double-check whether the figures that did appear in the *Canberra Times* accurately reflect—

Members interjecting—

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I think it is reasonable to say that I will need some advice from the directorate as to whether those figures do accurately reflect the figures that were actually provided to specialist schools in terms of what a student resource allocation budget would look like for those schools for those schools.

The key point, Mr Speaker, is that it was clear from day one that the student resource allocation model was not going to be an appropriate funding model for specialist schools, there was always going to be an exceptions process for specialist schools and that specialist schools would not see a reduction in funding from 2026 to 2027. That has been clear in communication with specialist schools all along. The directorate has now sent a further message specifically to specialist school communities. I have put out social media to address this issue. It is absolutely clear, as I said yesterday multiple times, that specialist schools will not receive a reduction in funding from 2026 to 2027.

MR CAIN: Minister, if you do not know what the figures are, how can you say that there is no reduction in funding?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I refer Mr Cain to my previous answers.

Public schools—funding

MS LEE: My question is to the Minister for Education. Minister, in question time yesterday, when I asked you when the school budgets will be finalised, you said, and I quote:

That is what happens every single year. But there is always an indicative budget that is provided, that is pretty close.

Minister, given your own words—that indicative budgets are “pretty close” to the final budgets—will you now concede that many ACT schools are facing cuts to their individual school budgets in 2027?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Ms Lee for the opportunity to clarify, because in reviewing the *Hansard* yesterday, I did think that I was probably a little bit loose. It is absolutely true that budgets are only finally finalised in April of the school year, but there is a final budget that schools can use to plan on, and it is usually provided to schools in November-December. So, we are expecting that the final planning budget will be provided to schools in November. Following this iterative process, where the early indicative budget under the SRA model was provided, schools were asked to go away and come back to the Education Directorate on this: “What would it look like to

meet that budget? Is that is going to be too difficult? Do we need to support your transition? How can we work with you to ensure that the final budget actually ensures that you can deliver excellent education safely for all of your students and staff?"

That is the process that we are currently in, Mr Speaker. It is a new process. I recognise it is stressful. I want to thank the small team of staff in the Education Directorate that have been working an incredible number of hours through this process, based on the data that they had which they knew was incomplete. They told schools it was incomplete and that they would need further information from schools to finalise this process. So, the timeline will take us through to, about, November. I will take on notice to provide some firmer dates around that, but I am pleased to have had the opportunity to clarify that process.

MS LEE: Minister, how can principals have any confidence in you, given that yesterday it was April and now, today, it is November, and they were given indicative budgets in August?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Well, principals already know what the process is. There have been conversations with the directorate. What has changed in the last week is that that process has slowed down. We know that, obviously, there was significant concern from school communities. Principals have indicated, and the Education Directorate has indicated, that more time is required, including to get out and talk to schools about the potential impact of any changes and to do that really thorough risk assessment with schools, not just with principals and school leaders but in going out to the wider school workforce in the way we are required to and would always want to in terms of engaging the workforce to understand any risks associated with any change. So that process will be given time to occur early in the next term.

We are about to head into the stand-down period and school holidays, so the first couple of weeks of next term will be an opportunity for principals and school leaders to have those conversations with their school communities about what the challenges are for their individual schools, recognising that each school is different and each school is facing different types of challenges in relation to their budget situation for next year and what it would take to transition to a Student Resource Allocation plus adjustment-based-resourcing model allocation.

Ultimately, Mr Speaker, this is about fair and equitable funding across our school system, something that was clearly indicated was required by the Public School System Resourcing Review. We are following the recommendations of that review—something that this place has previously supported, and I will continue to do so.

MR COCKS: Minister, isn't the real underlying issue that schools, parents and staff are preparing for cuts based on the figures provided by your directorate, while you continue to tell the public that those cuts do not exist?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: While I have been clear that the overall education budget has not been cut, I have also been clear—and we have been clear from the start—that some school budgets would be reduced from 2026-2027 to ensure that funding across our public education system is more equitable, in line with the recommendations of the Public School System Resourcing Review. That has been clear from the start.

I am sorry to see the level of distress that has been caused in the community in relation to this process. This was a new process, and I recognise that some of the communication could have been managed better, not only by me but by the Education Directorate in terms of their conversations with the union and the conversations with principals. They were always going to be difficult conversations, and that is why the directorate endeavoured to undertake a comprehensive risk assessment for the process itself. This was not for the outcome of the process; this was for the management of the process itself, to ensure that those risks could be mitigated. So, I apologise to anyone who has experienced distress as a result of this.

We have tried to be really clear that we are slowing the process down and that we are continuing to have those conversations with schools so that this iterative process can result in budgets received in November and finalised in April. This will ensure that every school can manage to deliver the education that our students deserve, safely for students and staff.

ACT Training Awards

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: My question is to the Minister for Skills, Training and Industrial Relations. Minister, the ACT Training Awards were held earlier this month. Can you update the Assembly on the awards and who the winners were?

MR PETTERSSON: I would like to thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for his strong interest in vocational education, as well as his advocacy for the south side and expanded TAFE offering in Tuggeranong. The ACT Training Awards are the premier event to celebrate vocational education in our city. It is always a fantastic evening filled with amazing, inspiring stories. This year's awards attracted over 60 comprehensive nominations across 11 award categories. Each and every nomination tells a fantastic story of success in our city.

While, unfortunately, there is not time to go through every nominee, every winner and their stories, I would like to extend my sincere congratulations to all of them. I would like to share with the chamber the major award winners.

I would like to inform the chamber that Emmi Lee is our apprentice of the year; Nathan Snow our trainee of the year; Caitlin Carter our vocational student of the year; Mickyia Glover our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student of the year; Khoa Dang Nguyen our school-based apprentice of the year; and Tim Hawke our VET teacher of the year.

Each winner overwhelmingly deserves their award and acclaim. They do amazing things each and every day in our city. I wish them the absolute best in anticipation of the Australian Training Awards, which they will be heading to in November.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Minister, what is the importance of the ACT Training Awards, and promoting achievement in vocational education?

MR PETTERSSON: I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for the supplementary. Mr Speaker, our city needs vocational education to function. VET grads make our city run, and we

should celebrate their accomplishments. It is important that we recognise this dedication because it can encourage more people to pursue a VET pathway, and that is a wonderful thing for our city.

One particular example I would like to share with the chamber is, of course, our trainee of the year, Nathan. After a life-changing health experience, Nathan reflected on how he could make a difference in the lives of others and, as a result, commenced his traineeship in early childhood education and care. While balancing work, family and study responsibilities, Nathan has developed into a valued educator and leader within his workplace. His achievement highlights both the importance of VET as a pathway—not just into care but into the broader economy—and the resilience demonstrated by so many trainees across our community. Congratulations to Nathan in particular, and to all of the ACT winners on your amazing successes.

MR EMERSON: Minister, what is the government doing to improve completion rates at the public vocational education and training provider, CIT, which lagged behind those many other VET providers?

MR PETTERSSON: I would like to thank Mr Emerson for the supplementary, and I appreciate his continued interest in CIT. It is always interesting when people frame their questions in ways that speak down the public provider. CIT provides an important offering in our city and the reason it is so important is CIT has a focus on inclusion and equity, in which it seeks to support those that might not otherwise pursue vocational education—not to just enter it to, but try to complete it. That is not always the case for all VET providers. So, to compare completion rates to an institution that has as its central mission inclusion and equity, I do not think is a good point to raise.

But I would highlight for the member that CIT is working though the ACT government with the commonwealth government, through the National Skills Agreement to improve completions. Completions are a good thing, Mr Speaker. They grant those that have done their study a qualification that is important for them as they enter the workforce. But completions should not be the one, sole, only measure of success when it comes to vocational education. For many people seeking VET education, their objective might not be the completion but a job. And for someone, commonly a young person, who has entered into a VET pathway but can secure a job that they are seeking before they complete, that is not a bad outcome, Mr Speaker.

As a government, we do have an interest to make sure that, commonly, taxpayer subsidised learning opportunity is completed. One, so they have that qualification for the future. Two, so we as a city make sure we have the skills and qualifications we need. These are not straightforward or simple measures, and I do not think crass questions with comparisons of that nature are particularly useful, Mr Speaker.

Mr Barr: Thank you, Mr Speaker, that would be 48 questions and supplementaries, so I will ask that all further questions be placed on the notice paper.

Supplementary answers to questions without notice

Gaming—political donations—Canberra Labor Club

DR PATERSON: Mr Speaker, I am seeking your advice. I believe that Mr Emerson

has misled the parliament and made a false imputation about me that I misled listeners on ABC Radio last week. The question I was asked on ABC Radio was, "Can you confirm or deny money is coming from the Labor Party to the Labor Club?" I said:

No, money does not come from the Labor Clubs to the Labor Party, and any of your listeners who would like to understand this further can go to the Elections ACT website, where they can see financial records of both the Labor Club, the 1973 Foundation and ACT Labor. So money does not. The Labor Party has not accepted donations from the Labor Club in over a decade.

I was very clearly asked about cash donations and responded about cash donations. I am seeking that Mr Emerson withdraw his comments and correct the record, as I did not mislead listeners on ABC Radio last Friday morning.

Mr Emerson: Mr Speaker, I asked whether the minister had misled listeners, so I am not sure that I can withdraw claiming that she had; that was the question. Going to the definition, the minister did say that the party has not accepted donations, and I made it clear in my remarks that, under our electoral laws, whether the word used is "money", free facilities that are used or in-kind contributions, these are all forms of donations. Money and in-kind contributions are treated as equivalent under the ACT Electoral Act, so I do not believe that I have misled the chamber by not reading out the entire transcript of the interview.

MR SPEAKER: Minister, at the end of the day, the member is not withdrawing, so your next step would be to bring a substantive motion. If someone believes that someone has misled, fundamentally, an allegation of misleading would require a substantive motion.

DR PATERSON: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I again ask for your advice. He has made imputations about me that I have misled listeners, and I would again ask you to ask him to withdraw those imputations or correct the record.

MR SPEAKER: I will have to review the *Hansard* because he is saying he has not, and I do not want to make that decision without going back and looking at what was said. I will do that. Are there any other matters?

Mr Braddock: There is a slightly separate issue arising from the same line of questioning. Minister Paterson, in her response, indicated that other parties here also benefit from gifts-in-kind from gambling entities in the form of free facilities use. I can assure the Assembly that the Greens do not accept such gifts-in-kind of free facilities use from gambling entities. We like to use libraries, community halls and spaces which we pay for.

Mr Emerson: While we are correcting the record on responses to my questions, the minister indicated that I had received a \$5,000 donation from the manager of a club. Independents for Canberra, the party, received a \$5,000 donation from the manager of a club before I was a candidate or before we had any policies. I take the point. I have since personally repaid the donation, although the organisation that receives it no longer exists, and I understand that the manager of the club has since passed it on to the ACT Gambling Support Service.

Mr Cocks: Mr Speaker, on the same range of matters, the Minister for Gaming Reform, during this line of questioning, did indeed concede that the Labor Party does in fact receive gifts-in-kind from the Labor Club. She also stated “as do other parties”. I have had a quick look at the donations disclosure records, and I cannot see any record of a party other than Labor receiving any in-kind donation from the Labor Club. I would like to suggest that perhaps the minister should review the records to make sure she has not misled the Assembly.

Dr Paterson: I will clarify my point in relation to the Canberra Liberals that any other party has received in-kind donations from clubs. I will withdraw any reflection on the Greens, and I will stand by the statement that Mr Emerson, as the leader, in the last election, of the party Independents for Canberra, received both in-kind donations of room hire and a cash donation of \$5,000. I also do not receive the in-kind donations that the Labor Party receives—me, personally. The party receives them.

MR SPEAKER: Members, we are starting to turn this into a debate. I think I am done. If someone wants to bring forward a substantive motion, they can do so, but I am not going to take any more points of order on this issue.

Public schools—funding

MS LEE: Mr Speaker, I am seeking a bit of clarification. In questions that I asked the Minister for Education, she referenced the risk assessment plan. There was an argy-bargy, when she told me to open my ears, and she mentioned that she had received it. She then proceeded to read something from her tablet. Can I clarify whether that was from that document? If so, could she table that, under standing order 213? It was hard to know what she was reading from.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I am happy to table that document later this afternoon, recognising that it would always be available under FOI.

Access Canberra—customer accounts

MS CHEYNE: Mr Speaker, I also seek your guidance. Yesterday, Mr Cain asked me a series of questions that I took on notice. I appreciate that I have a time period in which to respond to those, and I intend to uphold that, except that it turns out that those questions are substantially the same as a question on notice that he submitted as part of his 101 questions from last Thursday and Friday, when they were sent through. Which one do I respond to, or am I being required to direct my public servants to spend time on both, which I think would be a misuse of resources?

MR SPEAKER: Perhaps. Hopefully, it is a copy and paste, so it should not take too much time. I will seek some advice from the Clerk on that. Nothing has been answered yet, but once you answer one of them, you will be able to use that answer in reference to the other one. You will be able to say, “In accordance with the answer provided.” You still have to respond to it, but you just reference the answer that you have already provided.

MS CHEYNE: Like I have to do with so many of them.

MR SPEAKER: On a separate issue, the issue of questions on notice has been raised with me, both by the Clerk and by others, in terms of the number and nature of them. I am looking into that as an issue, and I will get back to the Assembly with a way forward on questions on notice. It is not just a matter that is affecting this parliament; it is affecting others, as it turns out.

Papers

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

ACT Disability Strategy 2024-2033—First Action Plan 2024-2026—Annual Report 2026, together with a tabling statement, dated September 2026.

Auditor-General Act—Auditor-General’s Report No 5/2026—Concession, rebate and social support scheme—Government response, dated September 2026.

Bus frequency Improvement—Assembly resolution of 5 December 2024—4th update, September 2026. Children and Young People Act, pursuant to subsection 727S(5)—ACT Children and Young People Death Review Committee—Annual Report—2024/2025, dated 25 June 2026, together with a tabling statement.

Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment Act, pursuant to section 21—

At a Crossroad—Special Report—Extinction or survival for our Canberra Dragon, dated September 2026.

Government response, dated September 2026.

Education and Care Services National Law as applied by the law of the States and Territories—Education and Care Services National Further Amendment Regulations 2026 (2026 No 290) dated 19 June 2026, together with an explanatory statement.

Financial Management and Government Procurement Legislative Compliance—Select Committee—Report—Inquiry into the Financial Management and Government Procurement Legislative Compliance—Government response, dated September 2026.

Freedom of Information Act, pursuant to section 39—Copy of notice provided to the Ombudsman—Freedom of Information request—Decision not made in time—Education Directorate—FILE2026-15258, dated 11 September 2026.

Heavy Vehicle National Law as applied by the law of States and Territories—Heavy Vehicle National Law Amendment Regulation 2026 (2026 No 348), together with an explanatory statement.

Molonglo Valley playing fields—Improvement—Assembly resolution of 11 June 2026, dated September 2026.

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

ACT Civil and Administrative Tribunal—Determination 9 of 2026, dated 16 September 2026.

ACT Magistrates Court Judicial Positions—Determination 8 of 2026, dated 16 September 2026.

ACT Supreme Court Judicial Positions—Determination 7 of 2026, dated 16 September 2026.

Chief Executive Officer of ACT Courts and Tribunal—Determination 12 of 2026, dated 16 September 2026.

Director of Public Prosecutions—Determination 13 of 2026, dated 16 September 2026.

Full-time Statutory Office Holders—Chief Executive Officer, ACT Integrity Commission—Determination 11 of 2026, dated 16 September 2026. Part-time

Public Office Holder—Determination 14 of 2026, dated 16 September 2026.

Part-time Statutory Office Holder—Integrity Commissioner—Determination 10 of 2026, dated 16 September 2026.

Respite care services—Improvement—Assembly resolution of 26 March 2026—Government response.

Woden Town Centre Integrated land use plan—Assembly resolution of 3 February 2026—Government response—Woden Town Centre Working Group—Quarterly report, dated undated.

Paediatric oncology and haematology services—proposed unit

MS LEE (Kurrajong) (3.37): Together with Mr Parton, I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) the ACT does not currently operate a self-contained paediatric oncology and haematology service, with care provided through a shared-care model involving Canberra Health Services and tertiary services, principally the Sydney Children's Hospitals Network;
- (b) while the current model enables some treatment and supportive care to be provided closer to home, many children and families are still required to travel interstate for specialised diagnosis, treatment, clinical review and other tertiary services; and
- (c) interstate travel for treatment can impose significant emotional, financial and practical pressures on families already dealing with a child's serious illness;

(2) further notes that:

- (a) a recent Assembly petition calling for a dedicated paediatric oncology and haematology unit at Canberra Hospital received 2,364 signatures, demonstrating significant community concern about current arrangements;
- (b) an enhanced regional paediatric oncology and haematology service would increase the range of care safely delivered in Canberra while maintaining access to interstate tertiary services for highly specialised treatment; and
- (c) Canberrans travelling interstate may access assistance through the ACT Interstate Patient Travel Assistance Scheme (IPTAS), but families have raised concern about the onerous administrative burden, often requiring them to repeatedly provide evidence of travel, accommodation and appointments during periods of acute stress and intensive caregiving responsibilities; and

(3) calls on the Government to:

- (a) undertake a formal feasibility and scoping exercise into establishing an enhanced regional paediatric oncology and haematology service at

Canberra Hospital, in partnership with the Sydney Children's Hospitals Network and other relevant clinical partners;

- (b) ensure the scoping exercise considers:
 - (i) current patient activity and treatment pathways;
 - (ii) which aspects of paediatric oncology and haematology care could safely and sustainably be delivered in Canberra;
 - (iii) workforce, infrastructure, pharmacy, pathology, imaging, inpatient and day-treatment requirements;
 - (iv) clinical governance, escalation and transfer arrangements with tertiary services; and
 - (v) the capital and recurrent funding required for the preferred model;
- (c) engage with the Commonwealth, NSW Government and Sydney Children's Hospitals Network to identify opportunities to expand the proportion of paediatric oncology and haematology care that can safely be delivered closer to home;
- (d) strengthen IPTAS by reducing unnecessary administrative requirements for families undertaking repeated interstate treatment, improving access to assistance in advance where appropriate and reviewing travel, accommodation and transport assistance against the actual costs faced by families; and
- (e) report to the Assembly by 1 December 2026 on the outcome of the feasibility and scoping exercise, discussions with NSW and tertiary clinical partners, the preferred service model and proposed reforms to IPTAS.

Last week I spoke in this chamber about the petition that was signed by 2,364 Canberrans calling on the ACT government to establish a dedicated paediatric oncology and haematology service for our region. During that speech, I spoke about how this issue first came to my attention earlier this year, when I received a heartfelt letter from Robyn, who shared the story of her young son, Emmett, and their family's journey through childhood cancer. I acknowledge Robyn, who is sitting here in the gallery today, as well as Joanne from Ronald McDonald House. Thank you for being here.

Robyn's letter described the reality of regularly travelling more than 3½ hours to Westmead Children's Hospital in Sydney for essential treatment and specialist care, and how, for most families, a medical appointment is an inconvenience, but for families like Robyn's, it becomes an exhausting all-day or multi-day ordeal. In her letter, Robyn spoke about the toll it takes, with time away from school and day care, and separation from family and their support networks, and how, for Emmett, it means being away from his biggest supporter, his six-year-old brother.

As Robyn herself has told us, her and Emmett's story is not unique. I also mentioned that I had been contacted by Kara, a single mother whose three-year-old daughter, Tilly, was recently diagnosed with cancer, and about how Tilly is facing six to seven months of treatment in Sydney, away from her home, her friends, her extended family and the support networks every parent relies on during the most difficult times of their lives. I ask members to imagine confronting your child's cancer diagnosis whilst simultaneously working out where you will live, how you will travel, how you will pay

the bills, and how you will keep your life together.

That is what this motion is about. It is about this Assembly acknowledging how difficult life becomes for families like Robyn's, Kara's and many others across our region. It is about drawing a line in the sand and saying that, as the nation's capital, Canberra should be able to offer world-class health care to all, and especially to our children, our most vulnerable.

This motion also recognises the reality of the region that we represent. Canberra is growing. Every year, more families choose to make Canberra their home. At the same time, our city serves as the major service centre for a much broader region, extending well beyond the ACT's borders, and including communities throughout southern New South Wales. When we talk about health services, we are not simply planning for today's population. We must plan for the city and region Canberra will be in 10, 20 and 30 years time.

A growing population inevitably means greater demand for specialist healthcare services. More young families moving into our region means more children who may require specialist treatment. More people means more complex healthcare needs and greater pressure on existing services.

Cities are not judged simply by the roads they build or their buildings. Cities are judged by the communities that they are home to. They are judged by the decisions of the very people who have been entrusted to look after the most vulnerable in our community. They are judged by what we collectively decide is acceptable and what is not.

We are the nation's capital. The fact that Canberra families cannot access essential, life-saving health care close to home when they need it most is a blight on our city, and it is a blight on this government.

No parent should have to wonder why the national capital and a region of this size cannot provide more paediatric cancer care locally. No parent should have to repeatedly leave their community, their support networks and their employment to access treatment that, where clinically appropriate, could potentially be delivered much closer to home. No child battling cancer should spend any more time away from their family and support networks than absolutely necessary.

This motion calls on this government to acknowledge that we must do better. This motion calls on this government to look at how we can do better, to undertake a formal process to consider options, to engage with the commonwealth, the New South Wales government and the Sydney Children's Hospitals Network, and to explore ways to expand the proportion of paediatric oncology and haematology care that can safely be delivered here, close to home.

Importantly, this motion does not pretend that there are simple fixes to simple issues. Nobody is suggesting we can replicate every specialist service overnight. Nobody is suggesting that Canberra will immediately become a replacement for major interstate children's hospitals. This motion is calling on the government to properly investigate what more can be done and to identify opportunities for partnership.

In addition, the motion calls on the government to reduce the unnecessary administrative burden associated with the Interstate Patient Travel Assistance Scheme. Robyn has detailed her frustration with this scheme, as have many others—how they have given up claiming access because of the volume of paperwork involved in repeatedly compiling evidence of travel, accommodation and appointment details. Why do we ask families to fill out multiple forms, photocopy receipts and continually justify their expenditure when they are literally fighting for their child's survival? Why do we create additional administrative burden, administrative hurdles, for families already carrying unimaginable burdens?

No-one is arguing that we need checks and balances when it comes to taxpayer moneys. Mr Assistant Speaker, can you imagine, as a parent, when you are focused 100 per cent on essential life-saving treatment for your child, having to think about, and prove, that you filled up your petrol tank during or after your trip, as opposed to doing it before, so that you can head straight to hospital the next day, without having to stop? That is the kind of administrative, unnecessary burden that we are talking about. Surely, we can find another way. Surely, technology and common sense can help to simplify this process. Surely, our focus should be on supporting families, not overwhelming them with unnecessary red tape.

That brings me to the broader issue of government priorities. Governments will always face difficult choices. Despite what this government might say, we on this side of the chamber understand that governments cannot fund everything, build everything and promise everything. Resources are finite. Choices must be made. But those choices reveal a government's priorities. When families are being forced to travel interstate for critical health care, it is reasonable for Canberrans to ask whether this government has its priorities right, and that is what this debate is about.

When governments talk about limited resources, Canberra families have every right to ask why hundreds of millions of dollars can be lost and wasted through failed and botched projects, yet families like Robyn's, like Kara's, are still forced to leave their homes and travel interstate with their young children, just to access essential health care.

Mr Assistant Speaker, imagine what even a fraction of the money that has been wasted by this government could achieve—expanded paediatric services, improved family support programs, enhanced telehealth and outreach services, or even the establishment of a more comprehensive paediatric oncology and haematology capability, right here in Canberra.

At its heart, this motion is not about politics. It is about children. It is about families. It is about reducing hardship during some of the darkest moments that a family can experience. It is about ensuring that a growing region, a growing city, and the nation's capital, has essential healthcare services that match the needs and expectations of the community that it serves. Families like Robyn's, families like Kara's, are not asking for special treatment. They are asking for fairness. They are asking for support. They are asking their elected members to stand up and say it is not acceptable that these children are having to travel for life-saving treatment. They are asking us to do everything that we reasonably can to bring care closer to home.

I believe that this is a reasonable request, and it is one that I urge every member in this chamber to support. 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) (3.48): I rise today to respond to Mr Parton and Ms Lee’s motion, and I thank them for bringing this motion to the Assembly today. I would like to reaffirm the ACT government’s commitment to ensuring that every Canberran can access high-quality care close to home. I would also like to acknowledge Robyn. I would love to meet with her and have a chat to her about her experience. I also acknowledge Ronald McDonald House for the work that they do—incredible work, in supporting patients in these extreme circumstances.

The government recognises that caring for an extremely unwell child has a significant impact on families. I acknowledge that these impacts touch every part of a family’s inner workings. The impacts are significant on relationships, on siblings, and on those family and friend networks here in Canberra that do what they can to support families going through treatment. We know that practical things, like work, finances and attendance at appointments, are impacted, not to mention the emotional impacts, like the stress, the isolation and the overwhelm.

The government is strongly committed to supporting these families through one of the most challenging and complex journeys that they will probably ever face. This means ensuring access to the safest and best care that these children and young people need. I would like to bring to the attention of the Assembly the ACT Child and Adolescent Clinical Services Plan. There has been quite significant work done, and it is publicly available, around how the ACT government proposes to provide this best care to children and young people.

We know that people want to be able to access care close to where they live, and the government continues to deliver this for our community, where it is safe and reasonable to do so. A real-time example is the South Tuggeranong Health Centre, soon to be completed and opened, that will provide specialised, multidisciplinary community paediatric services.

We also know, as outlined in the Child and Adolescent Clinical Services Plan, that many treatments, including childhood cancer services, require large patient volumes and specialist expertise to meet safety and quality thresholds, and are therefore most appropriately delivered through the Sydney Children’s Hospitals Network.

In order to improve treatment of and survival from cancers, the recognised approach is to commission these services for large populations of at least two million, to maximise the opportunities for standardising care and evaluating outcomes. This best-practice approach is something that the ACT government has been working on for many years. The Child and Adolescent Clinical Services Plan describes how we are strengthening access to interstate specialist care through effective care coordination, shared care arrangements and seamless clinical pathways between ACT services and the Sydney Children’s Hospitals Network. The plan supports local delivery of care, where it is safe and sustainable to do so, while recognising the ongoing role of Sydney Children’s Hospitals Network in providing highly specialised services.

In this motion, the government is being called on to undertake a feasibility and scoping exercise into establishing an enhanced regional service at Canberra Hospital. In fact, this is work that the government has already undertaken, as part of this Child and Adolescent Clinical Services Plan. While most actions in the plan have been implemented and embedded into business-as-usual service delivery, several actions remain in progress and have implementation timeframes extending to 2030.

The Child and Adolescent Clinical Services Plan was developed through a comprehensive planning process led by an independent child and adolescent clinical services expert panel, chaired by Professor Michael Brydon. Representation on the expert panel included interstate paediatric experts, consumers, regulators, Canberra Health Services and the ACT Health Directorate. The expert panel considered extensive evidence, including population and health needs data, service utilisation patterns, access to interstate care, findings from previous paediatric service reviews, consumer feedback, and stakeholder advice from clinicians, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives, the Sydney Children's Hospitals Network and other key partners.

Given the breadth of consultation and evidence underpinning the plan, I would like to highlight, and urge colleagues to familiarise themselves with, this plan that is currently available. In addition, the inquiry into health system data, demand and processes—the Michael Walsh review—recommended a review of the ACT Health Services Plan and refinement of supporting clinical services plans.

While government is yet to provide the formal response to the Walsh review, we know that significant work is progressing across several areas. As this work progresses, there may be an opportunity to consider whether any changes to future service planning priorities or service delivery arrangements may further support the intent of Mr Parton and Ms Lee's motion, while maintaining alignment with the broader health system reform and planning objectives.

The current situation, where families need to travel interstate for life-saving treatment for their children, is not an easy one, but it is the safest one. I again reiterate my acknowledgement of the incredibly difficult time that families who are going through this experience with this arrangement.

Establishing a standalone specialist paediatric oncology service requires consistent caseloads, specialised multidisciplinary staffing and high clinical volume, to ensure that clinicians and the full range of allied health, nursing and critical care supports can remain safe and proficient. For rare cancers with extremely low case numbers in our jurisdiction, this is not feasible.

The ACT government remains committed to providing care as close to home as possible. Whenever it is clinically safe, paediatric oncology supportive care is provided in Canberra under shared-care arrangements with the Sydney Children's Hospitals Network. This model operates nationally for patients with rare and highly specialised cancers, and ensures children receive the safest and most effective care available.

CHS paediatric services can administer some treatments to cancer patients locally, including central venous catheter care, blood and platelet transfusions and very limited

day-stay chemotherapy. CHS offers care for children with a cancer diagnosis who have a fever, which we know is a common complication of cancer treatment. Follow-up care is also available for children with more common oncology diagnoses, such as those with acute leukaemia and some solid tumours.

The Sydney Children's Hospitals Network oncology team visits Canberra Hospital quarterly to provide outpatient oncology clinics and to try to support local families. The Sydney Children's Hospitals Network visiting oncology team consists of two to three clinicians, one fellow and one clinical nurse consultant.

The shared-care arrangements in place with Sydney Children's Hospitals Network provide our children and young people with access to world-leading oncology teams. We know that, across Australia, around 1,000 children and adolescents are diagnosed with cancer every year, and this is absolutely heartbreaking. For CHS, in each of the years 2024-25 and 2025-26, there were 16 paediatric patients that were referred to the Kids Cancer Centre for treatment—a total of 32 children over two years. These figures include children living across the border, within 50 kilometres of the ACT.

We know that these are not just figures. They are people with families and villages who want to ensure that they are supported in a way that feels helpful when they face the worst period of their lives—one that has likely changed them forever. I acknowledge that there should be seamless links between the two health systems. I am committed to working with the New South Wales government to ensure this for our families.

The ACT government is committed to making the provision of these interstate services easier for children and families, as the children and adolescent plan outlines. I am aware of and very open to engaging in the conversation with patients, and with their families, to ensure that the work we are undertaking provides them with adequate support. It is absolutely understandable that families and the community have an interest in the current paediatric oncology and haematology services landscape. The government is with them, and it will continue to find ways to ease the burden that they currently face.

In relation to the motion's calls-on—and I believe the Greens will be moving amendments, which we support—to strengthen IPTAS, Canberra Health Services has recently reviewed and updated the IPTAS policy and application form to improve clarity for applicants and streamline administrative processes.

The IPTAS guidelines are currently being finalised and will be published on the CHS website, following completion. The review is ongoing, with a expected completion date of July 2027. The changes, as part of the review, are intended to enhance the user experience, reduce administrative burden and support more timely processing of applications for families involved.

For 2026-27, the reimbursement rates were updated and increased to better reflect contemporary travel and accommodation costs, including fuel and consumer price index movements, while maintaining alignment with comparable patient travel assistance schemes operating in other Australian jurisdictions. The accommodation subsidy increased by 14 per cent, compared to the previous financial year, and the private vehicle subsidy for a Canberra-Sydney return trip increased by eight per cent from the previous financial year.

The review is also looking at internal processes to ensure there is adequate training and consistent understanding of policy document requirements, to ensure Canberrans accessing IPTAS undergo a seamless and timely recovery process.

We know that there is always more that we have to do. As part of the review, I will continue to explore and consider what greater support may look like for patients and their families, both now and into the future. The government will continue to ensure that the services we deliver meet the needs of the community where they need them and in a way that supports their experience and outcomes.

The amendments that Ms Vassarotti will move provide nuance and ensure sufficient time to align several pieces of work currently underway in order to appropriately meet the update to the Assembly by 30 June 2027. I thank the members for their motion.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (4.00): I want to start by thanking Mr Parton and Ms Lee for bringing forward this motion today. It is an important one, and I am very glad to have the opportunity to speak to it. I would also like to thank Robyn Wakefield for her tireless advocacy on this issue on behalf of her son, Emmett, and for instigating the petition with Ms Lee that has, in part, brought on this motion and this important conversation.

As I said in a speech on another motion brought forward by Mr Parton earlier this week, 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—is that we must meet the health and care requirements of those who need them, whatever they may be. I can think of no greater or no more devastating need than a child with cancer. As Senator Pocock—who has also been advocating on this issue in support of Ms Wakefield, when she raised it in May—said, “If our health system cannot look after sick children, is the system actually working?” I think that is the question, and the answer, quite obviously, is no.

Emmett and his family’s story is devastating in so many ways, including how common it is. I have heard from patients and healthcare workers that the idea of not having a paediatric oncology and haematology service in the ACT is becoming increasingly hard to justify. This will only get harder to justify as our population continues to grow. The long-distance travel and the disruption to schooling and employment, and separation of families for extended periods of time—these are not things that we should expect of families who live in a city of almost half-a-million people.

As if experiencing all those challenges at once is not enough, of course, this comes during what is one of the most difficult experiences that a parent and their child could conceivably encounter. Parenting is hard enough at the best of times, and parenting with a child who is going through an experience like this, and having to travel to deal with that, for me, as a parent with young children, is really hard to imagine. I think it is such a credit to Robyn that she is also taking the time to advocate, to engage with politicians and to pursue help not just for herself and her son, but for other people in their situation.

Sometimes, when we are discussing issues in this place, it can be easy to see policy issues and challenges through our own eyes, our own experiences, and just through the policy and budget lenses, which to some degree is understandable. That is our job; I get

that. But the people become abstract in the debate, and it is almost like we have to deal with these matters without engaging with human experience, without engaging with the suffering, which can lead us down paths that might look logical on the face of them but actually do not make sense, when you think about the human reality of what is under consideration.

We need to, where we can, step into the shoes of people like Robyn and Emmett when we are debating issues that affect them. We need to imagine how exhausting it must be for them to drive up to and back from Sydney over and over again, to miss out on schooling for that travel, to use up additional leave and miss employment opportunities, to have to split up the family and spend excess time apart, during this vulnerable and incredibly traumatic time, just to give their child the best chance at life. As Robyn said, for a child with cancer, those journeys are not just inconvenient; they are exhausting and physically punishing.

We know, as has been discussed, that there is a scheme in place, the Interstate Patient Travel Assistance Scheme, to assist with the financial burden of this travel. It is welcome that this scheme is in place. It is a good thing. But as the motion notes, there are clear issues with the administrative burden this is placing on families, with some saying that the burden makes the scheme more trouble than it is worth. Most devastatingly, no parent should ever have to spend their child's final days or hours away from Canberra, away from their family and support network, and away from the comfort of home.

Although I previously said that Canberra's population of half-a-million people, and growing, justifies the calls-on in this motion, the reality is that that need extends far beyond the border. Our health catchment stretches from Canberra to Goulburn, down to Bega, all the way to Jindabyne. Not only does this proposed service help Canberrans, but it would also help many of our neighbours in regional New South Wales who find themselves travelling even farther for their child's cancer treatment than Canberrans do.

Lastly, as referenced in this motion, the call clearly has broad community support, having garnered 2,364 signatures in the associated petition. Reporting by 1 December on the results of the proposed feasibility study and scoping exercise may be a bit tight, if we are expecting a quality job, so I am okay with shifting that timeline. I think it is time, and it is an incredibly reasonable call-on, and I appreciate that, from Ms Lee and Mr Parton today. Let us scope this out. Let us do a feasibility exercise. Let us get some clarity and some transparency about what we are asking of the government before we ask it to be done, in order to make a clearer decision. I think this is an incredibly important first step, and I am really glad that it appears we are likely to agree to that today.

I appreciate all parties having worked collaboratively to agree on a final form for this motion, which I wholeheartedly support, and I hope that it enables real changes to our healthcare system to be delivered, so that we can lighten the very heavy load being carried by families like Robyn's and Emmett's here in Canberra and surrounding regions.

MR PARTON (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (4.06): I rise to speak in

support of this motion. I am a co-sponsor, so it would be pretty weird if that was not the case. I want to thank the work that has been done by my colleague, Ms Lee, who has been a dog with a bone. And she has been a dog with a bone because it is really important. And I know the petition just went gangbusters. And Robyn, who is in the gallery, you talk about dogs with a bone: whew! They pushed this because it is desperately important and it is just a wonderful thing that we are all in here talking about it, at this level.

I know the amendments from Ms Vassarotti have not been moved yet, but I just want to mention them now as well.

When a child in Canberra is diagnosed with cancer or a serious blood disorder, we should do everything that we reasonably can to make sure that that child can receive as much of their care as safely and appropriately possible, close to home—because it is important.

Now, unfortunately there are some circumstances where that is just not currently possible in the ACT. However, there is still much more that can be done to support these kids and their families. And the issues that this motion seeks to address and the actions it asks the government to take; we do not think they are unreasonable ones. This motion is not a proposition that says Canberra should attempt to replicate every highly specialised paediatric oncology service that exists in Sydney, because it is just not possible. I mean, we sat down in my office and went through a process of getting the best-case-possible scenario costings. And, you know, we understand that they are really high. The motion and its amendments before the Assembly recognise that distinction.

The reality is that the ACT does not currently operate a self-contained paediatric oncology and haematology service. Care is delivered through a shared care model involving Canberra Health Services and interstate specialised services, principally the Sydney Children's Hospitals Network. Canberra Health Services itself describes paediatric oncology as being delivered under a shared care arrangement with tertiary paediatric oncology services such as Sydney's Children's Hospitals Network. And there are good reasons why highly specialised paediatric services are going to be concentrated in larger centres. It is just a fact of life. It is reasonable, I think, to acknowledge that many treatments require a reasonable number of patients to meet safety and quality thresholds, and that highly specialised services require specialist skillsets that can often only be sustained in larger jurisdictions such as Sydney and the wider Sydney area. So, we cannot lose sight of that.

This is not about creating a service for the sake of creating a service. It is about asking a much more important question, Mr Deputy Speaker, and that is: what care can safely be delivered here, and what can we do to make the experience of accessing that care better for children and their families? That is the question that is now before the Assembly and, in effect, the government.

A diagnosis of cancer is devastating. It is devastating for any family. For a child, it can mean repeated appointments, invasive procedures, intensive treatment, lengthy periods away from school and friends, and just an enormous disruption to ordinary family life. And for families in Canberra and the surrounding region, some of that disruption can involve travelling interstate to access specialised services.

The ACT government's current Child and Adolescent Clinical Services Plan recognises that children with chronic and complex conditions may have care shared between ACT services and the Sydney Children's Hospitals Network. Now, the plan specifically identifies the need to strengthen those shared care arrangements, improve continuity of care, and clarify the respective roles of the ACT and Sydney services.

And that is important because shared care should not simply mean that a family is sent to Sydney whenever something becomes complicated. A genuinely effective shared care model should mean that the services communicate with one another, clinical information follows the child, responsibilities are understood, and families know who is responsible for coordinating their care.

The government's plan discusses shared clinical protocols, education and training, access to relevant clinical information, and opportunities for staff to work across the ACT and Sydney systems. And we agree that they are sensible objectives. This motion now provides us with an opportunity to examine these objectives more closely. The amended motion—when it is amended—will call for a feasibility and scoping exercise to consider an enhanced regional paediatric oncology and haematology service, and we firmly believe that is the right approach. It is not in any way unreasonable for us to better understand what services could be provided locally. Equally, I think we need to understand what services must continue to be provided through other tertiary centres.

As part of this work, we will also have an opportunity to examine what a potential workforce might look like, what patient volumes are necessary to maintain safe and high-quality care, and to understand what infrastructure and equipment would be required. And none of it is cheap. None of it is cheap. I guess, most critically we need to understand the clinical governance, escalation and transfer arrangements that would need to sit behind any expanded service.

Mr Deputy Speaker, let me clearly articulate that the goal of this work should be to determine which care can be delivered safely in Canberra, by who, under what arrangements and with what access to tertiary expertise when it is required. There is already a foundation on which to build: PLaNS, the Paediatric Liaison and Navigation Service exists specifically to help children with complex health needs and their families to navigate the health system, including where children need to travel outside the ACT for specialist medical care. Canberra Health Services describes PLaNS as a single point of contact to help families coordinate care and anticipate and overcome barriers. That is an important service, but this motion recognises that we can do more.

This motion rightly presents two distinct but connected elements. The first is the long-term service question: what should paediatric oncology and haematology look like in Canberra? The second is the immediate family support question: what can we do right now to make the existing system work better for children and their families?

And the answer is, we should do both. We do not need to choose between improving the current system and examining what the future system could look like.

The amendments will require the government to report by 30 June 2027 on the feasibility and scoping exercise; its discussions with New South Wales and other

specialised clinical partners; and include the preferred service model and the completed IPTAS review, with an interim report on the IPTAS review by March of next year. That gives the government time to do this work properly. It also gives the Assembly a clear point at which to come back and ask, “What did you find? What can be safely delivered here? What did the clinical experts say? What did the families say? And what changes can be made immediately?”

So, further, Mr Deputy Speaker, it will enable us to critically assess what investment, workforce and infrastructure would be required to implement a potential future model. That is a much more useful conversation than simply a group of politicians arguing about whether Canberra should or should not have a paediatric oncology unit.

I believe it is sensible to acknowledge, now at the start of this process, that it is very likely that there will be some highly specialised treatments where interstate tertiary care will remain necessary. It is just a fact of life, and it will just be clinically appropriate while we explore what can be provided locally.

Notwithstanding the opportunity the loan presents to improve the connection between those two parts of our system, this is what an effective regional model should achieve. And I think, Mr Deputy Speaker, families should not have to choose between the best possible clinical care and being close to home. Sometimes the nature of highly specialised medicine will mean that travelling to Sydney is unavoidable, but where treatment, monitoring, supportive care or clinical review can safely be provided here, it is reasonable that it should happen. And where interstate care is necessary, we should be making the journey as coordinated and supported as possible.

The government’s clinical services plan already recognises the importance of strengthening shared care with Sydney Children’s Hospitals Network and this motion now asks the government to take the next step. It asks us to properly scope what an enhanced regional service could look like and to strengthen the supports available to families now.

We must, at every opportunity, remind ourselves that behind every discussion about models of care, governance arrangements and service planning are children and families who are going through one of the most difficult experiences imaginable. Indeed, if you have not experienced it, it is probably impossible to imagine. They deserve that we get this right. This motion is an opportunity to do exactly that. So, I commend the motion and I also think pretty highly of the amendments, when they when they come forward. Thank you.

MS VASSAROTTI (Kurrajong) (4.15): I rise to speak in support of this motion as well as our amendments, and seek leave to table the amendments together.

Leave granted.

MS VASSAROTTI: I move:

Ms Vassarotti, by leave, moved the following amendments together:

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

- “(a) the ACT does not currently operate a self-contained paediatric oncology and haematology service, with care provided through a shared-care model involving Canberra Health Services and interstate specialised services, principally the Sydney Children’s Hospitals Network;”.
2. After paragraph (1)(a), insert:
- “(aa) many treatments require a reasonable number of patients to meet safety and quality thresholds, and highly specialised services require a specialist skillset that can often only be met in large states such as NSW;”.
3. Omit paragraph (2)(b), substitute:
- “(b) an enhanced regional paediatric oncology and haematology service may increase the range of care safely delivered in Canberra while maintaining access to interstate tertiary services for highly specialised treatment; and”.
4. Omit paragraph (3)(b)(iv), substitute:
- “(iv) clinical governance, escalation and transfer arrangements with specialised services; and”.
5. Omit paragraph (3)(d), substitute:
- “(d) complete the review of IPTAS to enhance the user experience, reduce administrative burden and support more timely processing of applications;”.
6. After paragraph (3)(d), insert:
- “(dd) as part of the IPTAS review, immediately offer all families a PLaNS (Paediatric Liaison and Navigation Service) navigator and consider what viable solutions may provide greater support, both now and in the future;”.
7. Omit paragraph (3)(e), substitute:
- “(f) report to the Assembly by 30 June 2027 on the outcome of the feasibility and scoping exercise, discussions with NSW and specialised clinical partners, the preferred service model, and completed IPTAS review, and provide an interim report on the IPTAS review by March 2027.”.

I would like to start by thanking Ms Lee and Mr Parton for bringing this motion to the Assembly. It is a really important issue that requires attention. It speaks to the issues that we care about and we should prioritise. We have really appreciated working with both your offices, and particularly recognise the work that Ms Lee did supporting the petition. We also appreciated working with the minister’s office to support and enhance this motion, and ensure that we are doing all that we can to provide support and care now and into the future.

When a child is diagnosed with a serious blood disorder or cancer, it is beyond distressing for the whole family. And as a parent and as a mum, as a number of us are, it is hard to fathom how you can manage this reality. And I want to particularly acknowledge the families who have taken time out to be here today; Robyn and others who have done incredible work to bring this issue to the attention of the Assembly. Thank you, and know that you are not alone and that we do deeply care about this issue.

There is no doubt that the lives of a child, their parents and their siblings can be turned upside down with the emotional upheaval that comes with dealing with a diagnosis, as well as the financial and the practical implications of this. On top of this, because of the nature of these illnesses, many families must travel interstate for their child's treatment.

But there are burdens that the ACT government may be able to ease. If more paediatric oncology and haematology services could be delivered safely in Canberra, children and their families would not have to travel interstate so much for treatment. They would be spared the time, the money and the stress that comes with that, and disruption in their lives would be minimised. As children, they would be able to spend more time in the environments that give them the stability they need when going through such a stressful time as this.

We do understand that the ACT is not a large jurisdiction and that specialists sometimes do need to have a decent number of patients to ensure and maintain safe practice. That is why we think it is entirely reasonable to investigate whether it would be safe and feasible to set up an enhanced paediatric oncology and hematology service here in Canberra, recognising that in some instances people might need to travel.

We think it is also important to engage with the commonwealth, the New South Wales government and the Sydney Children's Hospitals Network—since this is where most children are referred for oncology or haematology services—to identify what opportunities there might be to safely increase paediatric oncology and haematology services here in Canberra. We owe it to families who need these services to do our best to ensure that if more things can be delivered safely here, that it is done.

But if that is not possible, or at least in the meantime until expanded services can be set up here, there need to be things done to make interstate travel for their care easier. And that means making the Interstate Patient Travel Assistance Scheme, or IPTAS, as easy as possible to use for families travelling interstate for these services, and making sure it is as helpful as possible. So, we are really pleased to hear that there is a review of the IPTAS on the cards. This is information that has emerged through the discussion regarding this motion, and it is very welcome. We look forward to hearing more about how this will be undertaken, and how families and community partners will be part of this review.

We acknowledge that parents have so much to deal with, and we thank them so much for providing information about how services can be improved. Just try to imagine having to navigate several services such as IPTAS, the treating hospital, the Patient Liaison and Navigation Service, Ronald McDonald House, travel and hospital accommodation, all while going through the already distressing and arduous treating journey for a child with cancer or a blood disorder.

I can imagine for many families it is simply too much. So, ensuring that all these families do get offered a Patient Liaison and Navigation Service navigator, again, is a most welcome addition to this motion. We think it is vital that reviewing ways to make it easier to travel interstate for a child's treatment is an important and urgent thing to do. It is something that can make a real difference to peoples' lives.

We ask the ACT government to look at what can be done in the short term to make

things easier while a more comprehensive review is being undertaken. This does not have to require a large investment; simple things focused on making life easier for families.

This motion and our amendments may not fix everything, but it is a start that we hope will make a difference to the lives of children with illness, and their families. The process of working through this motion and debate has also shown that the different parts of the Assembly can come together to really try to make a difference to families and the ACT community. I commend the amendments and the motion to the Assembly.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (4.22): I cannot really add anything more than what has already been said. I will just say a few words. I thank Mr Parton for bringing forward this important motion, and I rise to support it and the amendment. For families whose child is diagnosed with cancer, the challenges are already overwhelming. Having to leave Canberra and travel interstate for treatment only adds to the emotional, financial and practical burden—at what is already an incredibly difficult time.

Keeping children closer to home means keeping families connected to their support networks, schools, workplaces and communities. It allows parents and carers to spend more time focused on their child and less time dealing with travel, accommodation and administrative arrangements. Improving access to the ACT Interstate Patient Travel Assistance Scheme is also a sensible step. Families facing serious illness should not be burdened with unnecessary bureaucracy when they are already under immense pressure.

As Canberra continues to grow, it is appropriate that we investigate what options may exist to expand access to specialist paediatric oncology and haematology services closer to home. While these are highly specialised services, demand is likely to increase alongside our population.

This motion is about supporting children and families during some of the hardest moments of their lives. It is about reducing unnecessary stress, strengthening community support and ensuring that, as our city grows, our health services keep pace with the needs of Canberra families.

MRS MORRIS (Brindabella) (4.23): I wish to speak in support of the motion brought forward by my colleagues, Mr Parton and Ms Lee. I want to thank and acknowledge our guests in the chamber, Robyn and Ronald McDonald House. Thank you for your advocacy and for the work that you have been doing to get sick children in Canberra the care that they need, closer to home.

This is a motion that seeks to find a way forward for so many Canberra families who are experiencing the stress and trauma of caring for a child with cancer without the support of specialised health services here at home. Caring for a sick child will never be easy. It is emotionally and physically exhausting. It is all-consuming. And it is all those things without the added complication of embarking on a seven-hour return trip to get the life-saving care that your child needs.

Sadly, this is a burden that is placing so many families in our community in survival mode—where they are mustering all the strength they have to care for their sick child,

all the while trying to maintain all their mutual family, home, work, financial and other responsibilities. My heart breaks for Robyn and for any other family that is living in that situation and are trying to find their way through it.

Last week in the Assembly, I spoke to Robyn's petition which was presented by my colleague, Ms Lee, and I shared some of our own experience and the trauma that it can cause—and it leaving you feeling torn when you want the stability and routine that every child needs of being close to home and close to family and close to community, but desperately needing those health services that the child needs.

As the nation's capital, it is really difficult to comprehend that we do not have these services established in Canberra. Ms Lee is right: Canberra is growing and so will the health needs of our community. It is important that we are able to respond to the health needs of our community so that no unwell child is left behind or forced out of their home to get the life-saving care that they need.

We should be asking whether Canberra's health services are keeping pace with the needs of our community, and I think that is effectively what the motion does today. So, again, I thank Ms Lee and Mr Parton for the enormous amount of work that they have done in bringing this together, and I commend this motion to the Assembly.

MS LEE (Kurrajong) (4.27): To the amendment and in closing, Mr Deputy Speaker, I thank all members for their contributions to this debate. It is an important motion, and I am glad that we are able to work on it together to ensure that it gets passed.

Just in relation to the amendment. Obviously, our first motion had a return reporting-back date by December this year, but I understand that in discussions with the minister's office she has given some reasons as to why that might not be possible. And so, we have agreed as a collective to a timeframe of June 27 but with an interim reporting-back by March, to ensure that Robyn and Joanne and all the other families are kept up to date with what is happening with the calls-on, in this motion.

I was a little bit concerned to hear some of the narrative from the minister. I would hope that she is not setting the groundwork to not follow through, because there was a lot of talk about, "Well, you know, the safest option is Sydney." And so, I do want to put on the record that in unanimously passing this motion, we are going to be holding the government to account to ensure that they are reporting back on the interim arrangements in March, and that if they are not up to scratch we will be on to it and we will, as an Assembly, be bringing that back.

The minister also talked about making the IPTAS process seamless and timely, and I think that is an important thing. The unnecessary administrative burden of going through that process just adds to the unimaginable burden of so many families. I remember trying to access it once myself and giving up and just saying, "You know what, I am just going to wear the cost." And I did that. For me, I was someone who had access to experience working with bureaucracy, and it was just a one-off. So, I can only imagine what that burden is like for families who are dealing with very sick children, and who are doing it constantly. So, this is really important and, certainly at the moment, "seamless and timely" is not a way to describe the process. So, that is welcome.

I think Mr Emerson is right. I mean, our communities and societies are judged on whether our health system is able to look after sick children. And if we cannot, the system itself is broken and that is a blight on our community, on our government and on our city.

In my opening speech I mentioned Kara and her daughter Tilly, who had recently been diagnosed with cancer. She desperately wanted to be here today. Ironically, she is actually in Sydney getting treatment and is not able to be here. But I know that there are many of her family and friends who are watching, and those family and friends who have rallied around her as well, including Henry, whose daughter is best friends with Tilly and who takes on the burden of looking after Tilly's sister whenever she is required to travel to Sydney.

Canberrans are incredible, and those who have close networks absolutely have so many close friends who rally around—including the support they get from Ronald McDonald House. Mr Parton and I had a chance to go up to visit Ronald McDonald House at Canberra Hospital only a few weeks ago, and we got to see first-hand the incredible work that they do, how important it is, how valuable it is, and thank some of the volunteers who donate countless hours to ensuring that sick children and sick families are never alone. But our government cannot outsource looking after the most vulnerable members of our community, and that is why this motion is so important.

I will put on the record my thanks to Mr Parton. I know that I was a pain but I am glad that you did agree to my numerous, numerous requests to make sure that we get this done because you knew it was important and you knew how valuable this is for Robyn, for Kara and for so many families. So, thank you. And I thank Ben, actually, from Mr Parton's office, who did incredible work on this motion, as well as Kelly from my office, who I always kind of describe how good she is. So, thank you, Kelly, for everything that you have done.

And I thank all members for the support of this motion, but I mostly want to put on the record my thanks to Robyn. Robyn, your advocacy is nothing short of incredible. And I go back to a few months ago when I received that heartfelt letter from Robyn when this petition got kicked off, and she talked about a particular time where she just said, "You know what? It is not good enough and we need to change." She talks about a time after one harrowing treatment and she is travelling back with her son, and Emmett has thrown up after the effects of treatment, and she finds herself in a public toilet on the side of the Hume Highway cleaning up. No parent wants to go through that, and no child should have to go through that. I think that anyone who heard that story—I cannot imagine anyone not being moved by that and wanting to make sure that we did everything in our power to make a change because it was so important.

This motion, as I said, Mr Deputy Speaker, is about the families and is about the children. This is not a magic fix and Robyn is well aware of that, but it is important for elected members of this place to put on the record that what we have now is not cutting it, and that we must do everything that we can to look at how we can make things better because our children deserve the very best care. As the nation's capital, we deserve nothing less. I thank all members for their support for this motion.

Amendments agreed to.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Energy—data centres

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (4.34): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes the:

- (a) Chief Minister's announcement to create an ACT Data Centre Framework (ACTDCF) to ensure consistency and clarity for investors; and
- (b) ACT has around 15 data centres already, and there are current applications for new data centres which may not be subject to the proposed framework;

(2) further notes that:

- (a) data centres are energy and water intensive and operate 24 hours a day;
- (b) demand for, and development of, data centres is growing rapidly across Australia and community concern about their use and impact is widespread;
- (c) data centres pose a high risk for environmental damage and are not listed in the Planning (General) Regulation 2023 as a development requiring an environmental impact assessment;
- (d) without appropriate regulations, data centres' high energy and water use will impact household and business energy bills and could undermine our climate emissions reduction targets; and
- (e) data centres with closed loop water systems will still require significant amounts of water from our environment; and

(3) calls on the Government to:

(a) create an ACTDCF that:

(i) requires data centres to:

- (A) demonstrate clear and enduring local economic and social benefits for Canberra including opportunities for local employment, skills development and community wealth building as a primary threshold for approval;
- (B) purchase or create additional 100 percent renewable energy to match their demand by using Renewable Energy Guarantee of Origin (REGO);
- (C) ensure they do not increase electricity or water prices for Canberra households;
- (D) use flexible demand, backed by renewable solutions;
- (E) meet the full costs of any energy, water or utility infrastructure upgrades attributable to their development or expansion;
- (F) implement best practice water and energy efficiency as

- standard, currently closed loop water use;
- (G) be battery backup only, that is, not diesel generator backup; and
 - (H) be sustainable in demands on the ACT's limited water supply;
- (ii) increases transparency of the magnitude of current and future water consumption, energy use and climate pollution by data centres;
 - (iii) has built in reviews to enable best practice to continue to be updated; and
 - (iv) ensures adequate community input, including First Nations traditional custodians, for data centre development or expansion;
- (b) review the *Planning Act 2023* and the Territory Plan to ensure that the water supply, environmental and ecological impacts of data centres are addressed as part of the Development Application process;
 - (c) undertake a deliberative participatory process to include and enable Canberrans, including First Nations traditional custodians, to provide input to the ACTDCF;
 - (d) consider innovative options such as co-locating data centres with public pools to use cooling water as a heating source;
 - (e) consider a levy on data centres or other mechanisms to ensure long-term wealth benefits of data centres continue to recirculate to the Canberra community;
 - (f) collaborate and coordinate with NSW and the Federal Government on interjurisdictional and regional water matters including factoring data centres into any future water and energy negotiations; and
 - (g) enact a moratorium on new data centres until the ACTDCF is in place.

Data centres are a hot topic at the moment. Australia and the world are in the middle of a data centre boom. Data centres are at the centre of one of the biggest economic and technological shifts of our time. Across Australia and around the world, demand for data centres is growing rapidly, as artificial intelligence becomes embedded in almost every aspect of daily life.

AI is now everywhere. It is summarising our search results, transcribing our meetings, helping doctors interpret medical scans, more accurately diagnosing cancer and endometriosis, and answering everyday questions that we once answered ourselves. It is almost impossible to even access the internet of old without AI now. Google searches put an AI summary at the top, and ChatGPT is replacing even the most mundane brainpower to answer questions like, "What shall I have for dinner?" or "Do the missing middle policies apply to the block I want to develop?"

Now, the technology itself is neither good nor bad—and I say that through gritted teeth as a certified AI slop hater. What matters is how we choose to use it, who benefits from it and who bears the costs. AI use is exploding, and with this has come demand for data centres on a scale we have never seen before. From massive warehouses to house the banks of servers that provide the computer processing power, down to micro data centres the size of washing machines.

The problem is that the profits largely flow to some of the world's biggest technology companies, and the costs are often borne by local communities. Communities host the infrastructure. Communities supply the land, water and power. Communities live with the environmental impacts, including the unsightliness and noise pollution. So, it is only fair that communities share in the benefits as well. And that is the principle at the heart of this motion.

I was pleased to hear that the Chief Minister has announced plans to develop an ACT data centre framework. The government's media release told us they would strengthen expectations for the construction of future data centres in the territory through a comprehensive ACT data centre framework, building on national standards as agreed by national cabinet. That work is needed. And I am bringing this motion to make sure that the community at the centre of this framework gets a real say in what it contains, so that the territory and the community also get to derive real benefits from the data centre boom, not just the one per cent and the tech billionaires.

Now, the ACT already has somewhere around 15 data centres by last count, and there are proposals for more. It is possible that some new facilities could be approved before the framework is complete, which is one reason we need to pause and get this right.

People are rightly concerned about new mega data centres. Around the world, communities are increasingly raising concerns about large-scale data centres. They are energy intensive, they are water intensive, they operate 24 hours per day. Even facilities using closed-loop cooling systems still place demand on water resources and require large amounts of electricity to operate.

We have seen concerns emerge internationally about pressure on electricity systems, impact on water systems, noise pollution and the environmental consequences of rapid expansion. We have all seen the environmental destruction that mega data centres are causing in other places. We are seeing what is happening in the US, particularly in places like the data centre alley in Virginia, where they started to delay decommissioning dirty power plants to keep massive data centres online. We saw the New York representative, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, hold jars of brown drinking water from Morgan County in Georgia at an Environmental Protection Agency hearing; the work of a Meta data centre under construction nearby.

Now, the ACT starts from a stronger position than many jurisdictions. We already have robust planning controls and a renewable energy target. We already cannot build data centres in residential areas. And we know that, of 15 or so here already, at least some of them use re-circulated water. But we are not isolated from the broader national electricity market. If data centres significantly increase demand for electricity, that demand has consequences beyond our borders. The power requirements of data centres are immense. And even the ACT, with 100 per cent renewable energy equivalent, is not immune from the impacts of this.

In the current climate—some pun intended—where the rest of Australia already desperately needs to rapidly transition away from fossil fuel powered electricity to renewable electricity, anything that adds additional demands to our country's power requirements is a problem. Yes, the ACT is powered by 100 per cent renewable electricity. This is great. But if we have a massive electricity increase here and bought

up every scrap of renewable energy available in Australia, and that extra requirement was replaced by coal or gas in some of the other states, is that actually a better outcome?

Minimising harm should be the starting point, not the end point. The test should not simply be whether a data centre avoids causing damage. The test should be whether it leaves Canberra and in fact the wider grid and our downstream catchment better off. Communities around the world, including ours, have these big tech companies over a barrel. We actually have some power and some control.

Now is the time to play hardball. They need us more than we need them. This is an opportunity to return significant benefits to Canberra that could go far beyond a few mealy-mouthed promises of jobs and investment. Data centres already account for a significant share of electricity demand, and that demand is growing rapidly. If data centres drive additional demand for electricity, water and infrastructure, this can have consequences for household bills, for emissions reductions efforts and for our broader environment.

That is why this motion is not simply about managing risk. It is about establishing a clear principle: if data centres want to come to Canberra, they must provide a clear and enduring benefit to Canberra.

This motion sets out what we want to see in our data centre framework, and also sets the expectation that we want the government to talk to the community about the framework. We do not want the community to be an afterthought and for government to mostly listen to big tech companies. We want the community to be the ones at the centre.

We want the basic requirement for any new data centre to be that it can demonstrate that it provides actual benefits to the territory and Canberra community. Minimising harm is not enough. We want them to be beneficial. We want the framework to require that data centres invest in additional renewable energy generation. If there is not enough renewable energy available to support a new data centre, development should be deferred until that additional capacity is built, or the proponent should be required to invest directly in new renewable generation and storage, such as solar and batteries.

This approach would ensure that large new loads do not compete with households, communities or other users for limited clean energy supplies. It would also support innovative models of community-owned renewable infrastructure, such as the Marlinja microgrid in the Northern Territory which is Australia's first 100 per cent First Nations owned and grid-connected solar microgrid—and which demonstrates how renewable energy investment can improve energy security while delivering direct benefits to local communities.

We want to see the framework require that new data centres are using the Renewable Energy Guarantee of Origin, or REGO. This does what is on the tin. It provides assurance that electricity purchased from the wider Australian grid is genuinely renewable, rather than merely offset. We do not want a situation where data centres claim to be operating on clean energy in Canberra, while effectively relying on energy generated from fossil fuels elsewhere. REGO requirements, combined with obligations to invest in new renewable generation, would help ensure that data centre growth

accelerates Australia's clean energy transition, while supporting equitable outcomes for communities, including First Nations communities pursuing their own renewable energy futures.

We also want the framework to guarantee that additional energy demands at data centres do not push up power prices for Canberra households and businesses. We want data centres to be investing in, and building more new renewable energy facilities; new solar, new wind, new batteries for more storage. Same for water. Having grown up in the millennium drought, with those cool hourglass things that always fell off the wall, I know just what a precious resource water is, in this town.

We also want this framework to guarantee that the cost of upgrading the infrastructure for the additional requirements of both energy and water used for new data centres does not fall to the wider community. Icon has already said that water will go up by about 6 per cent next year. If new data centres need more poles, more wires or more pipes to get more power and water to them, it should not fall on the community to pay for this—especially if the community is not seeing any additional benefit from the data centres.

We also want to see best-practice in water and energy efficiency to be the standard. We want it to be the floor, not a ceiling. If there is a better best-practice framework that is discovered in a couple of years, we want the framework to be able to be updated and improved. We also want to see that data centres in Canberra are not backed up by dirty diesel generators nor fossil fuel gas. We want to see battery as the only backup, so data centres in our community are guaranteed to be clean and renewable, at all times.

We want this data centre framework to increase the transparency of the magnitude of current and future water consumption, energy use and climate pollution by data centres. Canberrans need to be able to see and understand how much water and electricity that data centres in their communities are using. We need to understand the full picture so that when we have input into whether more data centres are approved, we can be consulted meaningfully.

We also need to make sure that the framework addresses all of the environmental and ecological impacts that might be caused by a data centre, through the planning system. Being compatible with the draft and final Nature Conservation Strategy and the current, outdated Nature Conservation Act—whenever this is going to happen—are key considerations because, at the moment, a data centre is not listed as a development that requires an environmental impact assessment.

The government needs to make sure that they are working together for good outcomes and we do not end up with a situation where the right and left hands of government do not know what the other is doing.

The framework must have built-in review points, so that best practice does not become outdated. It needs to be flexible so we can always have the ability to improve the regulations, so that they remain best-practice as new technologies emerge.

And the framework needs to have community input built in from the ground up. Not just consultation near the end; real input. And this must include working with our First Nations people and, in particular, traditional custodians. The Marlinja microgrid

provides a powerful example of how community-led design, ownership and benefit-sharing can deliver lasting social, economic and energy outcomes. And it offers a really important model for how major developments can partner with communities, rather than simply consulting or imposing on them.

There are new and exciting models of participatory democracy and governance to work with the community, to include the community in decision-making, and create settings where the wealth is created, shared and re-circulated through the community. It matters who gets a say and who gets to share in the benefits that data centres create. There are not-for-profits who are advancing these deliberative processes, and I call on the government to investigate these possibilities while building the framework. This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity, and it is important for Canberra to get it right.

Lastly, while developing this framework, I think the government should be open to exploring approaches that are already working overseas. In parts of Scandinavia, the United Kingdom, France and Canada, waste heat from data centres is being used to warm homes, apartment buildings and even public swimming pools. What sounds futuristic is already established practice. Nobody is suggesting that every idea will work in Canberra, but before dismissing these opportunities we should at least investigate whether they could reduce costs for community facilities and deliver benefits to Canberrans.

There are data centres and then there are data centres. Not all data centres are the size of a two-storey building. Devon in the UK has a public pool that has been heated by a washing machine sized data centre since 2023. The computers inside the box are surrounded by oil to capture the heat—enough to keep the pool at around 30 degrees Celsius, 60 per cent of the time—saving the leisure centre thousands of pounds. And the company that provides micro data centres to the pools does so for free, and then makes their money from selling the server capacity. Now, Phillip pool, interestingly enough, was built and designed years ago to use the excess heat from the ice rink to heat the pool. So, it is not as crazy as you might think.

This motion calls on the government to consider a levy on data centres. If we are giving up our land to host data centres, we need to be able to have long-term benefits from them, not just short-term construction jobs. In the long term, mega data centres use a lot of land and create a lot of wealth, but not a lot of jobs. This means not a lot of payroll tax, and if we cannot collect much payroll tax from mega data centres, maybe we need to consider whether a levy is a good idea—because this community needs to benefit; not just the one per cent and the big tech bros.

This motion also calls on the ACT government to collaborate and coordinate with New South Wales and the feds on inter-jurisdictional and regional water matters, including factoring data centres into any future water and energy negotiations. We know some councils in New South Wales are wanting to negotiate for access to ACT water. And we know that our upper Murrumbidgee desperately needs environmental flows from the Tantangara Dam. Water does not care about borders.

Lastly and most importantly, this motion calls for a moratorium on new data centres until the framework is in place. We do not want to risk grandfathering in some data centres approved under a less-than-ideal regulatory setting. The Scottish parliament got

their moratorium on massive data centres passed in the last couple of weeks, for much the same reason. So, it is not like this kind of careful work is rocket science. We have a very live precedent for it. The fed Greens have been calling for a national moratorium here in Australia until appropriate regulations are in place. This would be a much better outcome, and would demonstrate to the community that their concerns are being taken seriously. But if the feds are not going to do it, this is the next best thing. Let's get good regulations in place that are better than just harm minimisation.

Data centres are already here. The question is not whether we will see more of them. The question is whether we allow the benefits to flow almost entirely to multinational technology companies or whether we create a framework that ensures that those benefits are shared with the Canberra community. This motion says that if Canberra provides the land, the water, the infrastructure and the social licence, then Canberra should receive something in return. I commend my motion to the Assembly.

MR MILLIGAN (Yerrabi) (4.50): I thank Miss Nuttall for bringing this motion forward today, because it gives us an opportunity to talk about this very important topic. However, the Canberra Liberals cannot support the motion in its current form, so I will be moving an amendment. But first I would like to speak to Miss Nuttall's original motion. I begin my remarks by stating that data centres are at the cutting edge of innovation in the modern world. We support the decision made by national cabinet that state and territories should support the development of a framework. This will allow all governments to get the balance right between supporting business and innovation and managing community sentiment. I note that the government is currently developing an ACT data centre framework, with community consultation to begin shortly, and the final report is to be released early next year.

The question we must ask in this debate is: do we want to place conditions on a framework before consultation has even taken place, especially when the current system already requires data centre projects to undergo several planning approvals? For example, the Hume data centre project has faced significant environmental approval barriers following the discovery of that infamous legless lizard that was found near the proposed site. The developer applied for an environmental significance opinion which was rejected by Flora and Fauna. I bring this up not to indicate that I agree with this process or disagree but to show that data centres are not just being built with no regulations.

This is why the Canberra Liberals do not feel the need to support a moratorium on data centre development. The current settings are stopping developments which might have an environmental impact. Furthermore, the Greens cannot point to a single example of an existing data centre or proposed data centre which has been placed in a location which has caused mass community outrage. A moratorium would unnecessarily interrupt business continuity for proposed developments and might take developers currently looking to build in Canberra elsewhere.

MR MILLIGAN: by leave, I move the amendment circulated in my name:

Omit all words after paragraph (1)(a), substitute:

“(b) under the *Planning Act 2023*, development proposals requiring approval are subject to the development application process and assessed against

the Territory Plan;

(2) calls on the ACT Government to:

- (a) ensure the ACT Data Centre Framework:
 - (i) requires data centre proponents to demonstrate how the additional energy and network capacity required by their development will be provided, including through investment in additional generation, storage or other infrastructure, without transferring additional costs to existing households and businesses; and
 - (ii) ensures planning requirements are clear, proportionate and provide certainty for investment by identifying appropriate locations for future data centre investment and associated digital infrastructure;
- (b) actively pursue and facilitate investment in data centres and associated digital infrastructure that leverages Canberra's strengths in government, defence, cyber security, research and advanced technology, including by identifying appropriate investment-ready locations and providing clear pathways for prospective investors; and
- (c) engage with major domestic and international data centre operators, digital infrastructure providers and major users of data centre capacity to promote the ACT as a destination for appropriate digital infrastructure investment.”.

Imagine if Canberra were presented with a major new industry and the first response was to stop it. Imagine if billions of dollars in private investment were looking for a home, but Canberra had too many barriers compared to other states. This motion has opened a discussion at least, but there is both risk and an opportunity to consider. Data centres will become increasingly more important to Australia’s future. They support artificial intelligence, cloud computing, cybersecurity, government services, and many other parts of our digital economy. The Chief Minister himself has recognised these advantages and the economic opportunity that data centres present.

The Canberra Liberals believe that raising living standards depends upon the strong private sector that creates jobs and strengthens our economy. Governments have an opportunity and their role is in establishing the right environment for business and innovation. Governments should be asking, “How can we help?” This motion is focused primarily on data centres. The Canberra Liberals recognise that data centres can place significant demand on electricity, water and other infrastructure. Those impacts need to be properly understood and responsibly managed. In this case, any new data centre development that required substantial upgrades to our electricity network should take responsibility for the additional infrastructure demands for their development centre. Those costs should not simply appear on the bills of Canberran families and/or small businesses, and that is why our amendment adopts a straightforward principle. The Canberra Liberals believe in flexibility to allow for innovation.

I am not sure if all of us here in the chamber know exactly what data centre technology will look like in the next 10 years. Artificial intelligence itself is developing at an extraordinary pace and our regulatory system needs enough flexibility to develop alongside that technology. Governments should establish clear standards and then allow businesses to find innovative ways of meeting them. Imagine if a new cooling system dramatically reduced water consumption within the next several years. Our framework

should encourage that innovation rather than locking today's technology in tomorrow's rules.

We also see an economic opportunity that Canberra should actively pursue. The government's proposed framework focuses heavily on where data centres can operate and what standards should apply. Those are legitimate questions, but they are not the only questions. Other jurisdictions are already actively approaching investors to invest into their states and they are searching for suitable sites, clarifying infrastructure requirements and providing investors with straightforward pathways through government. If we do not act now, Canberra could lose investment despite having many of the natural advantages those investors need.

That is why our amendment goes further. We want government to identify appropriate locations that are genuinely ready for investment. We want clear pathways for business considering significant investment here in Canberra. We also want government engaging with major domestic and international digital infrastructure investors. This is not just about abandoning environment safeguards or ignoring infrastructure constraints; it is also about recognising that economic development requires government to consider opportunities alongside risks.

There are reasonable ideas contained within the Greens' motion. Transparency, infrastructure planning, efficiency and regular review can all form part of a sensible framework. However, a moratorium sends a very different message to prospective investors. A special industry levy moves away from the principle that business should meet the actual costs they create. Our alternative proposal rests upon a different balance. We should welcome enterprise while demanding responsibility for those who invest, we should protect Canberra households while creating opportunities for Canberra workers, and we should establish clear rules while leaving businesses enough room to innovate. But, most importantly, Canberra should confidently compete for responsible investment rather than watching those opportunities move elsewhere. Imagine what Canberra could achieve if we get the balance right. We can protect our community while building the industries that will support Canberra's future.

MR BARR (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Minister for Trade, Investment and the Knowledge Economy, Minister for Tourism and Events, and Minister for Major Projects) (4.58), by leave: I move the following amendments to Mr Milligan's amendment together:

1. After all text in paragraph (1)(b), insert:
 - “(c) the ACT already has comprehensive requirements for the approval of data centres;
 - (d) Canberra's role as Australia's seat of government provides a unique opportunity to attract digital infrastructure investment and creates a particular need for secure and reliable digital infrastructure;
 - (e) data centres support nationally significant activities, including:
 - (i) government service delivery;
 - (ii) weather forecasting and climate modelling;
 - (iii) environmental monitoring and natural resource management;

- (iv) scientific and academic research;
 - (v) cyber security and critical infrastructure protection; and
 - (vi) emergency management and disaster response;
 - (f) the growth of AI is increasing demand for high-performance computing and secure data storage, making sovereign data centres increasingly important for keeping sensitive data and AI capabilities under Australian control; and
 - (g) data centres contribute to investment, highly skilled employment, construction activity, technology capability and economic diversification in the ACT;”.
2. After all text in paragraph (2)(a)(ii), insert:
- “(iii) provides transparency regarding energy, water and infrastructure impacts;
 - (iv) supports renewable energy use, energy efficiency, water efficiency and innovation in infrastructure design; and
 - (v) ensures appropriate community consultation and engagement;”.
3. After paragraph (2)(c), insert:
- “(d) collaborate with NSW and the Commonwealth on matters relating to energy, water, digital infrastructure and regional planning associated with data centre investment; and
 - (e) consider innovative approaches to improve energy productivity and reduce emissions, including waste heat recovery opportunities, while recognising that major data centres are not appropriate within public pool and aquatic centre precincts.”.

The debate this afternoon is ultimately about Canberra’s future and the role that our city will play in Australia’s economy, its institutions and its national capability. Data centres are often discussed only in terms of the resources they consume. Those considerations matter, but, if they are all we discuss, we miss their broader purpose. Data centres are critical infrastructure. They support government services, research, education, telecommunications, cybersecurity, emergency management and economic activity, to name but a few of their purposes.

My position today, and that of the government, is straightforward. The ACT welcomes appropriate data centre investment. Our goal is to ensure these facilities are planned well, located appropriately and integrated into the territory’s long-term energy, water, infrastructure and land use plan. Canberra has a particular advantage in this sector. We are the seat of national government. We are home to major national security and research institutions, world-class universities and commonwealth agencies managing some of Australia’s most important information assets. Increasingly, those institutions depend upon sophisticated digital infrastructure.

In simple terms, the foundations of government in this century are no longer only roads, railways and public buildings; they also include secure networks, data storage, cloud computing and digital systems. That is one reason we have emerged as one of Australia’s most significant data centre locations. Operators, including those that have been built up in this city, like CDC Data Centres, NEXTDC, Equinix, Macquarie

Technology Group and others from around Australia, have established facilities here because Canberra provides proximity to the Australian government, major institutions and research users, as well as the fact that we have a highly skilled technology workforce in this city—the highest concentration of those skills on a per capita basis than any other city in this country. That capability is a genuine economic advantage. We have the most highly educated workforce and one of the highest concentrations of ICT professionals. The expertise that has been built here over decades in government technology, cybersecurity, telecommunications, software engineering and digital services is one of our economy's most significant competitive advantages.

Data centre investment of course creates construction work and it supports local contractors, engineers, project managers, suppliers, electricians and tradespeople, but it is what they do once operational that is most important. They support highly skilled employment and a broad ecosystem of technology businesses, cybersecurity specialists, communications providers and a plethora of professional services—frankly, the engine room of private sector employment growth in this city over the last decade. These are productive, high-value jobs that diversify the territory's economy. They create thousands of opportunities for local businesses and they help us to retain thousands of talented graduates in our city. They also strengthen the wider digital economy that has become one of Canberra's defining strengths.

The research sector also has a very significant stake in this discussion. Modern research depends on computing power and secure data storage. The ANU, the University of Canberra, UNSW Canberra, the CSIRO, Geoscience Australia, the Academy of Science and many other institutions undertake work in this city that increasingly relies on sophisticated digital infrastructure. Climate science, environmental modelling, geospatial analysis, astronomy, health research and cybersecurity research all depend on access to secure computing and data capabilities. Data centres are, in many respects, part of the research infrastructure of the 21st century.

There is also a significant national security and resilience dimension to this debate. Data sovereignty is no longer a niche policy issue. The ability to store and process important information domestically, under Australian laws and Australian oversight, strengthens resilience, security and public trust. This is particularly relevant in Canberra because so many of the institutions that are located here are located to perform national functions on behalf of all Australians.

In this debate it is also worth remembering just how much of everyday life depends on this infrastructure. Most government services, online banking, electronic prescriptions, telecommunications, entire university systems, weather forecasting, emergency warnings, digital mapping and cybersecurity all depend on digital infrastructure located somewhere in the physical world, and data centres are where much of that infrastructure resides. So the questions are not about whether we need them—it is bleedingly obvious that we do; the questions are about where they should be located, how they should be designed and how their impacts should be managed.

Modern data centres generate recoverable low-grade heat. This opportunity is most relevant where data centres are located close to compatible energy users. In our city's industrial estates, like Mitchell, Fyshwick, Beard, Hume and Symonston, there are compatible users: warehousing, advanced manufacturing, food production, processing,

logistics facilities, and potentially even district energy systems that can benefit from co-location. Large institutional precincts such as the ANU, UNSW Canberra, the University of Canberra and the major research facilities in our city also provide opportunities where proximity, scale and economics will align.

The principle that we have put forward is straightforward: where a data centre generates a resource that another nearby user could productively use, good planning should make that possible. With thoughtful planning, what has traditionally been regarded as waste can become an asset as it improves energy productivity, supports local industry and reduces emissions. We should also be realistic. Not every data centre will have a viable nearby heat user, not every precinct will be suitable and not every proposed co-location would make social, community, let alone economic or technical sense. So the objective should be to identify opportunities where genuinely viable rather than imposed artificial solutions are available.

None of this means that growth should occur without planning. Good planning is what enables investment. As Mr Milligan touched on, businesses need certainty, just as communities need certainty, and infrastructure providers need certainty. That is why, at both a national and a state and territory level, governments have agreed and are developing data centre frameworks as part of a nationally coordinated approach. The purpose is to provide clarity, consistency and confidence whilst ensuring that growth is coordinated with our territory's broader energy, water, infrastructure and land use planning.

A good planning framework does not create uncertainty; it should provide clear pathways for appropriate investment whilst ensuring that community expectations are met and that the infrastructure keeps pace with growth. In this regard, Canberra has a compelling proposition. We have proximity to government and to nationally significant institutions; we have world-class universities and research organisations; we have a highly capable ICT and cybersecurity workforce; we have decades of experience in delivering national digital services; and we have a city whose economy and future are built on knowledge, innovation and technology. These are strengths that have been built and developed over decades. We should make the most of them.

This city was established to serve the nation, and today serving the nation increasingly means supporting the infrastructure that underpins our nation's government services, our nation's scientific research, our nation's cyber-resilience and, perhaps most importantly in these times, our nation's data sovereignty. Data centres are part of that mission. My amendments this afternoon before the Assembly recognise that reality. They support investment and jobs, they support research and innovation, they support sovereign digital capability, and they support a planning framework that provides certainty for industry whilst, at the same time, protecting the interests of the community by being very clear about where data centres are going to be located, not opening left-field suggestions about spaces where the community clearly does not want them.

Most importantly, though, this amendment, building on Mr Milligan's amendment, reflects confidence in Canberra's future—a future in which we continue to be a centre of government, public administration and public research, a centre of knowledge, and a centre of sovereign digital capability. I commend my amendment to the Assembly.

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (5.10): I will truncate my remarks and address Mr Milligan's amendment to Mr Barr's amendments to Mr Milligan's amendment, and I foreshadow the amendments that I will be moving to those. I begin by thanking Mr Milligan and his office for sharing and discussing their amendment in genuine good faith. I think we disagree on some pretty fundamental questions, but the conversations themselves were constructive and helpful.

At its heart, this debate is not actually about data centres; it is about who the government is here to serve. The original motion was simple: if Canberra is going to host a new generation of large data centres, those developers should work in the interests of Canberrans. They should deliver public benefit, they should strengthen—not undermine—our climate goals, they should respect country, they should be subject to scrutiny, and they should leave our community better off. Somehow this has become controversial.

Let's start with the Liberal amendment. The most striking thing about Mr Milligan's amendment is that it consistently lowers expectations. Every time the motion asks something of developers, the amendment waters it down. Every time the motion raises a concern, the amendment removes it. Every time the motion asks what Canberra gets in return, the focus shifts back to what we can do for industry. The original motion said that proponents should demonstrate clear economic and social benefits to the ACT. Think about that. If a company wants access to our land, our infrastructure, our water, our electricity network and our planning system, shouldn't it be able to explain what the community gets in return? That should be the bare minimum. Instead, that requirement disappears. The conversation shifts from community benefit to developer convenience—not "How does this help Canberrans?" but "How do we make this easier for proponents?" That tells us everything we need to know.

The amendment also weakens expectations around renewable energy. The logic is straightforward: if a data centre is creating enormous new demand for electricity, it should contribute to enormous new renewable supply, otherwise ordinary Canberrans end up competing for the same resources. That is not anti-business; it is common sense.

Then we arrive at what I think is the most revealing section of the Liberal amendment. According to the amendment, the government's role is to pursue investment, facilitate investment, promote investment, identify opportunities for investment, engage with operators, engage with investors and engage with users. But where are the residents? Where are the environmental groups? Where are the traditional custodians? Where are the communities who will live with the consequences? Apparently we are rolling out invitations for multinational corporations while leaving everyone else standing outside.

The government is supposed to be the referee. This amendment would turn it into the industry's cheer squad. At times, reading it felt less like a planning framework and a bit more like an investment brochure: "Come to Canberra, use our infrastructure, use our electricity, use our water, and don't worry too much about the awkward questions regarding impacts, benefits or accountability." Nowhere is that clearer than in what has been deleted. Whenever the motion identifies a concern, the delete button gets a workout. Community concern—delete. Environmental concern—delete. Water use—delete. Energy demand—delete. Climate impacts—delete. It is not because these issues do not exist, not because they have been disproven and not because they have

disappeared; it is because they are inconvenient. You can delete words from a motion; you cannot delete them from reality. The power demand remains, the water demand remains, the planning challenges remain, the environmental risks remain, and community concerns remain. Deleting the words does not solve the problems; it simply signals a preference not to talk about them. That is why the Liberal amendment fails. It does not answer the concerns, it does not address the concerns, and it does not even acknowledge the concerns; it buries them.

Now to Labor. I have to admit I chuckled when I read the Chief Minister's amendments. After days of AI-generated images and social media posts, we now have Assembly amendments formally clarifying that major data centres are not appropriate within public pool precincts. Thank goodness. Canberra can finally sleep safely, knowing nobody is secretly planning to build a hyper-scale server farm at the deep end of Civic Pool. That is an extraordinary contribution to public policy. The remarkable thing is that no-one proposed this. No-one suggested putting server racks next to water slides. Nobody suggested turning our pools into cloud computing facilities. Labor invented an argument, spent a week arguing against it, and has now drafted a formal amendment so it can continue arguing against it. That is commitment.

But the joke reveals something important. Instead of engaging with difficult questions about energy consumption, water consumption, community benefit and environmental impacts, Labor has spent much of this debate trying to turn the discussion into a punchline. The original motion raised serious policy issues. Labor responded with AI slop and pool memes. Unfortunately, governing requires a little more than posting. Beneath the joke sits a more serious political reality. The Chief Minister tells us existing planning laws are sufficient, yet simultaneously the government is developing a data centre framework. Which is it? If the current framework is already perfect, why is a new framework required? If there are no gaps, why do the work? The very existence of the process acknowledges that there is room for improvement, but, before the process is complete, Labor has already begun ruling out options. That is not evidence based policymaking; that is deciding to act before you have done the homework.

Perhaps the most disappointing aspect of both the Labor and the Liberal amendments is that they remove requirements for consultation with First Nations traditional custodians. I genuinely want members to reflect on that. Every sitting day, we acknowledge that we meet on Ngunnawal country. We speak those words and we pay our respects, yet apparently some members are comfortable acknowledging traditional custodians at the beginning of the day and removing their right to be consulted on developments that may affect country by the end of the day. Members should sit with that contradiction because the community certainly will.

MISS NUTTALL: by leave, I move the following amendments to Mr Barr's amendments to Mr Milligan's amendment:

1. After all text in paragraph (1)(g), insert:
“(h) community concern about data centres and their impact on local environment and amenity;”.
2. After all text in paragraph (2)(a)(v), insert:
“(vi)requires data centres to buy or create 100 percent renewable

- electricity to meet the additional demand required;
- (vii) requires data centres to use closed loop water cooling and are sustainable on the ACT's limited water supply;
- (viii) requires consultation with First Nations traditional custodians for any greenfield data centre development;”.
3. In Mr Barr's amendment No 3, omit paragraphs (2)(d) and (e), substitute:
- “(d) collaborate with NSW and the Commonwealth on matters relating to energy, water, digital infrastructure and regional planning associated with data centre investment;
- (e) consider innovative approaches to improve energy productivity and reduce emissions, including waste heat recovery opportunities; while recognising that major data centres are not appropriate within public pool and aquatic centre precincts; and
- (f) consider a levy on data centres or other options to ensure long-term wealth benefits for the Canberra community.”.

That brings me to the Greens' amendments. I like to think of them as the “nature is healing” amendments, because what they attempt to do is restore some common sense to this debate. They put community benefit back in, they put environmental responsibility back in, they put consultation with traditional custodians back in, they put transparency back in, and they put the community back at the centre of the discussion. Our amendments acknowledge a very simple reality: community concern exists. That should not be controversial. In fact, pretending it does not exist is rather difficult when we have all received emails, representation and feedback raising precisely these concerns.

We also restore the requirement for additional renewable energy generation. I emphasise the word “additional” because, if data centres simply consume existing capacity, Canberrans ultimately pay the price. As the Chief Minister himself said when announcing the data centre framework, future developments should help build new renewable generation, not simply consume what already exists. Our amendments restore that principle. We also restore expectations around sustainable water use and closed-loop systems. Again, this is not radical; this is emerging best practice, and it aligns with statements the government itself has already made.

Finally, we restore consultation with First Nations traditional custodians for greenfield developments. If we are proposing major new developments on previously undeveloped country, the very least we can do is ask people who have cared for that country for tens of thousands of years. That should not be a difficult proposition. Our final amendment removes the most enthusiastic parts of the Liberal red carpet approach to international data centres and restores a request to consider a levy or other mechanisms for community benefit. Let's be very clear: we are not mandating a levy; we are asking the government to consider one—to consider options and to ask whether the community should share in some of the value generated from its resources. Apparently, even considering the question has become controversial.

The ACT budget faces immense pressures. Refusing to examine possible revenue streams is not prudent government; it is ideological government. Throughout this debate, we have heard a great deal about what data centres want. We have heard very

little about what the Canberra community actually deserves. The Greens' position is simple: we are not against technology, we are not against investment, and we are not even against data centres. We are against giving away our precious land, energy and water resources without ensuring that the public receive something meaningful in return. That should be the starting point, not a radical position.

I urge all members to support the Greens' amendments. Let's stop treating big tech as a guest that we are terrified to inconvenience, let's stop acting as though, as elected members, asking for public benefits is somehow unreasonable, and let's remember who sent us here—not multinational corporations and not data centre investors but Canberrans. I think that Canberrans are entitled to expect that, when we make decisions about Canberra's future, we put their interests first.

MR PARTON (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (5.20): For a while, I was worried Miss Nuttall was looking for a de-fib, because it all got a bit exciting! We often blame One Nation for relying on blind populism, but it is not always them. We are not of a mind to support the amendments from Miss Nuttall.

We are living in a brave new world; it is changing dramatically every day. As one of the older members of this chamber, I have seen a lot of technological change in my lifetime. I can still remember when colour TV came to Australia. The first thing we watched was the FA Cup final, and the grass was green. I thought, "Wow! That's crazy!" I remember the first personal computers and the emergence of the internet. In the last few years, artificial intelligence has grown from a concept to something that pervades just about every aspect of our lives, and that emergence is the single biggest thing that has escalated the proliferation of data centres around the world and here in Australia. AI was not used in any way in the formation of this speech.

This city of ours plays a unique role in the data centre market, and that has been highlighted by the Chief Minister. We are the home of the most critical data centres in the nation, and we should not forget that when we are talking about this space. We may be a relatively small city of half a million people, but we are the national capital, and it cannot be removed from a debate on data centres. The facilities in the territory support not only the work of the ACC government but also many nationally critical systems of the Australian government. It makes us, as a city, a critical partner for national resilience and service delivery, and, as such, it would be ludicrous for us to impose a moratorium on the establishment of any new data centres until the Greens have given their noble and earnest approval to any regulatory framework. That would just be silly.

Data centres are a significant employer and economic contributor in the territory. Most data centres in the ACT are not consuming water for cooling. I would particularly mention the Canberra-founded CDC, who have invested heavily in closed-loop cooling technologies, and they have done so for nearly 20 years. So, in essence, their centres operate like any other office building, where water consumption is driven by the number of people in any given location. That being the case, the original Greens' motion makes less sense. If we were to make a blanket prohibition on any industrial water use, we would effectively be prohibiting new hospitals, manufacturing facilities, universities and telecommunications infrastructure.

Mr Barr: And housing.

MR PARTON: And housing. I just cannot see why we would do that. I understand it is striking a populist chord in some sections of the community, but I do not know why we would do that. I would point out to the Greens that most data centres in the ACT—well, I am assuming all—are using 100 per cent renewable electricity and that, broadly speaking, data centres are already leading the energy transition as significant purchasers of renewable energy via power-purchasing agreements. Those big purchases are extremely important to the mathematics of renewable energy.

Data centres are also increasingly investing in onsite battery storage to improve resilience. However, they do live in the world as it is rather than how we would like it to be, because, for the worst scenarios, diesel generators still provide the ultimate level of resilience. Where battery systems may provide only two, three or four hours of backup power, diesel generators, as evil as they might be, can provide ongoing redundant backup power in catastrophic grid conditions that would enable services to continue, uninterrupted, until the power grid is restored, and we think that is pretty important.

Existing national energy rules already require major developments to pay for dedicated connection infrastructure and network augmentation, and it must be said that those energy infrastructure investments often deliver broader community benefits. The amendments from Mr Milligan and from Mr Barr are very sensible. I support them. We are not of a mind to support the amendments from Miss Nuttall.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (5.25 pm): I rise to support Miss Nuttall's amendments to include consultation and consideration of environmental and social amenity. I support the ACT government's development of an ACT data centre framework. This is an important piece of work because Canberra is already home to a significant number of data centres and the community deserves certainty about how these developments will affect our city. While investors understandably seek certainty about the regulatory environment, residents also need certainty about the impacts that data centres may have on their neighbourhoods and on the territory more broadly. Communities want to know what these developments will mean for noise levels, energy consumption, water usage, traffic movements and local infrastructure. They want confidence that these impacts have been properly assessed and transparently communicated before decisions are made.

Importantly, that certainty must extend beyond the planning approval stage. Too often, commitments are made during an approvals process only for communities to be left wondering whether those commitments are actually being delivered. Any framework must include mechanisms for ongoing monitoring, reporting and accountability to ensure that promises regarding energy efficiency, renewable energy sourcing and water consumption are not merely aspirations but obligations that are met over the life of a development.

I also believe we must be cautious about the sense of urgency that often accompanies discussions about the growth of the data centre sector. There is no doubt that demand for digital infrastructure is increasing, but that should not be used as justification for fast-tracking developments before the territory has the right policy settings in place. If

data centres are going to consume significant amounts of energy, water and land, the community should see a return. That return should come in the form of local employment opportunities, skills development, investment in community infrastructure, innovative partnerships, or other mechanisms that build community wealth and resilience. The threshold should not simply be whether a proposal avoids unacceptable harm; it should also be whether it contributes positively to the people of Canberra.

It is critical that the ACT government works closely with its counterparts in New South Wales and the commonwealth. Data centres do not exist in isolation from their surrounding region. Decisions made on commonwealth land within the ACT or just across the New South Wales border can have significant consequences for ACT residents, particularly in relation to water resources, energy infrastructure and environmental impacts. Without strong coordination between jurisdictions, there is a risk that developments with significant impacts could proceed outside ACT regulatory frameworks but still affect Canberra communities. Cooperation and alignment across governments will therefore be essential to ensure that the interests of ACT residents are protected.

For these reasons, I support the development of a strong ACT data centre framework—one that provides certainty to investors and transparency and protection for the community; one that ensures that data centres are not merely developments that minimise harm but are also developments that deliver lasting benefits for Canberra. If the ACT already has comprehensive requirements for the approval of data centres, as outlined in the Chief Minister’s amendments, it is not clear why we need a framework. I suspect that we might not already have comprehensive requirements and that is why we need a framework, so I will be supporting Miss Nuttall’s amendments today.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (5.29): I start by thanking Miss Nuttall for bringing forward this important motion today. I will be supporting her incredibly sensible and reasonable amendments. They do not read like populist calls or demands to me. I am holding up my own amendments—which is funny—which do not look like populist demands to me either. Miss Nuttall’s amendments are very sensible and reasonable, and I thank her for circulating them.

The regulation of data centres is an important issue to our community, and I know it is on the minds of many Canberrans, as the use and construction of data centres is rapidly increasing. I understand the amendments that I have circulated, as well as the amendments put forward by Miss Nuttall, after the motion was re-written by Mr Milligan, are not being supported by the government or the opposition today. Although I note the government has not yet spoken, that is my understanding. I have to say that this is surprising and it is disappointing as well.

There is serious concern about data centres and AI as well across our community. Canberrans expect us to take this seriously, but I think what we have seen is a good-faith motion from Miss Nuttall—which is trying to protect our community from risks and ensure that Canberrans actually benefit from this changing technological landscape—being minimised, mischaracterised, railroaded and rewritten into a watered-down shell that does not align with what our community expects.

Canberra is a progressive place—we know that. Canberrans expect that we will protect our environment, lead on climate and put our community's needs first. They expect us to look closely at data centres and AI and ensure we are all benefiting from these technologies. Based on how I understand the votes are falling today, the major parties are saying no to those expectations. While this motion deals directly with data centres and the local impacts of them, it sits within the context of a global discussion about how we regulate a rapidly expanding AI industry and how that can be expected to impact our everyday lives now and into the future.

It is important that our community knows that we are discussing and seeking solutions to their concerns in a rapidly changing world. This is not an issue with impacts far away and dealt with solely by world leaders and tech CEOs in Silicon Valley. Of course, this matter transcends global borders and it is a matter that we must work on together. But the expansion of AI and the need for data centres for cloud computing access and other purposes also has very local impacts. Those impacts are not likely to be felt by the tech CEOs, nor even by any members of this Assembly. As a small jurisdiction, it can be easy to dismiss our role in this. This problem can easily feel bigger than us and like the ultimate impact of this technology is beyond our control, and that, because of that, we should just get on board and let it rip.

Sometimes discussions around climate change and the impact that the ACT or even Australia can have on these broader global issues make us feel that we cannot have an impact—that we are helpless and hopeless. But, as is the case with climate change, what we do here really does matter, not only because it is imperative for all jurisdictions and governments globally to do their part, however big or small, but also to navigate deliberately and with care these wicked challenges rather than provide vague assurances that everything will be all right. But it is also because, from a policy perspective, as we have done in many areas, the ACT can be a leader. We can show other states and territories what best practice means. I have no doubt that is what Canberrans overwhelmingly expect of us.

I acknowledge the Chief Minister's remarks in this regard. He has indicated that is his desire. We have a chance to show that, as an Assembly, we can start that best practice policy on data centres with this motion. There is a lot to benefit from here when it comes to both AI and data centres. We need to make sure we are actually benefiting, not just assuming we will because we have been told how great it is all going to be. And we have a responsibility to mitigate against the risks of harm. In the context of such a rapidly expanding and evolving industry, we need to take proactive and meaningful urgent steps to put appropriate regulatory parameters in place to ensure Canberrans are not exposed to avoidable risk.

Of course, this motion is not the start of the discussion. Just last month, the ACT government announced that we will be developing an ACT data centre framework to align and build on work underway by the federal government, including national expectations of data centres and AI infrastructure developers released in March this year, work on national standards agreed to by national cabinet in July, and the consultation paper that came out last week regarding those standards. I really welcome the announcement on the ACT's data centre framework. As well as the work of the federal government, I look forward to seeing the draft framework early next year.

What I struggle to understand is why the calls in my amendments, which ultimately build on Miss Nuttall's and Mr Barr's amendments, will not be supported, given they are supposedly consistent with what the government actually plan to implement in the framework. What are they trying to hide if they are not comfortable supporting this? It is important to note in this debate that most of the original motion and the subsequent amendments that Miss Nuttall put forward were sensible. They align with community expectations on this issue, at least if the comments section in Mr Barr's recent social media posts are anything to go by, according to my team. Importantly, they are broadly aligned with the draft national standards and expectations put forward by the federal government and agreed to at national cabinet by the Chief Minister.

Given that context, the amendment to this motion put forward by Mr Milligan, despite being improved through the amendments from Mr Barr, essentially gutted what the call is all about, which is ensuring strongly and confidently that data centre expansion comes with tangible benefits for our community and reduces the risks that we know can emerge from unregulated and unchecked data centre expansion, including to pollution, biodiversity, energy bills, water supply, local experiences of this infrastructure—which can be noisy and polluting, as well as energy-hungry and water-intensive—and also construction sector capacity.

There are already reports coming out from major construction companies here in Australia of skilled labour being pulled away from delivering housing to delivering data centres. This is not about fear-mongering, scare-mongering or terror-mongering—I think that was the phrase Mr Werner-Gibbins used yesterday. It is about playing our role in shaping the decisions that will impact our community and involving our community in those decisions. That is our job.

Of course, there are significant benefits to data centres and to the artificial intelligence and other technological developments they are fuelling. As the government has noted, data centres are a crucial infrastructure for government agencies, Defence and cybersecurity, as well as hosting cloud computing capacity for members of the community and private business. Data centres are not new, but the rapid expansion is. They have existed in our community for many years. What we are likely to face is an unprecedented demand for a whole lot more of them. That presents both risks and opportunities for current and future generations of Canberrans.

MR EMERSON: by leave, I move the following amendments to Miss Nuttall's amendments to Mr Barr's amendments to Mr Milligan's amendment together:

1. After all text in paragraph (1)(h), insert:
 - “(i) demand for, and development of, data centres is growing rapidly across Australia; and
 - (j) international precedents (such as in Ireland and Virginia, USA) demonstrate that without appropriate regulation, the rapid growth of data centres can contribute to higher household energy and water bills and can undermine emissions reduction targets;
 - (k) the ACT is vulnerable to water stress from drought, climate change and population growth, and its biodiversity is in decline; and
 - (l) data centres can exacerbate negative ecological and water supply

impacts;”.

2. After all text in paragraph (2)(f), insert:

- “(g) ensure any data centres approved between now and the commencement of the ACT Data Centre Framework (ACTDCF) meet or exceed the standards set out at paragraphs (2)(a) to (f) of this motion; and
- (h) report back to the Assembly by the last sitting week of 2026 on the expected impact of data centre demand on the ACT’s legislated emissions reduction targets.”.

If going down, my amendments acknowledge some truths that the government and opposition are apparently uncomfortable with acknowledging—that the ACT is vulnerable to water stress from drought, climate change and population growth, and that its biodiversity is in decline. We know this, and it is critical that the new data centre framework adequately addresses this and that the government models the expected impact of data centre demand on our legislative emissions reductions targets.

As an Assembly, we need to do more to ensure that benefits are maximised, not just for those building and using data centres directly but also so that the benefits go directly to the people we are supposed to represent. That is what our community expects. While the government is putting together the framework on this, it is up to us to prove to our community that we are meeting their concern on this issue and taking action now. That is why, in my amendments, I called for data centres approved from now on to be covered by the standards set out in this motion—the standards the government insist they are already implementing—before the ACT data centre framework is finalised.

It has been put to me that one of the reasons these amendments will not be supported is that it is all getting a bit complicated—and that is reflected in the Speaker’s remarks about what we are voting on here—but that only happened because the Liberals completely rewrote the motion and Labor backed them in on that. How negotiations have unfolded on this leave me with little confidence that the government is actually going to be held to account on this issue and will take appropriate action to protect our community against the risks of this rapidly-growing industry. It brings with it benefits, but that is not risk-free. We already know it has been taken advantage of by malicious actors.

I thank the Greens for bringing this important issue to the consideration of the Assembly, although I wish we would land on a better outcome today. There is no doubt that data centres will feature heavily in Canberra into the future. Canberrans deserve real assurances that we all have a vision for the data centre industry’s expansion in Canberra to be safe and sustainable and that it directly benefits our community without exposing Canberrans or our environment to undue risk. I hope that we can ultimately work toward that vision. Overall, I am very supportive of the motion put forward—the original motion by Miss Nuttall—but I have a concern about imposing a moratorium on data centres in the ACT, given that we already have many here, which is why my amendments propose simply that any new data centres approved between now and when the proposed data centre framework comes into effect meet the standards we are voting to support today, but I understand even that amendment is going down. Canberrans want their elected representatives to show leadership on the rapid expansion of data centres.

Here is what the major parties are voting against today: acknowledging community concern about data centres and their impact on local environment and amenity; recognising that data centres can have negative ecological and water supply impacts; and noting that, without appropriate regulation, the rapid growth of data centres can contribute to higher household energy and water bills and can undermine emissions reduction targets. They are voting against requiring data centres to buy or create 100 per cent renewable electricity to meet additional demand; requiring data centres to use closed-loop water cooling and be sustainable on the ACT's limited water supply; requiring consultation with traditional custodians for any greenfield data centres development; considering a levy on data centres or other origins to ensure long-term wealth benefits for the Canberra community; and ensuring any data centres approved between now and the commencement of the ACT data centre framework meet or exceed the standards we are voting on today.

But do not worry, because they are voting in support of engaging with major domestic and international data centre operators, digital infrastructure providers, and major users of the capacity of data centres to promote the ACT as a destination for appropriate digital infrastructure investment. Bravo! I commend my amendments to the Assembly.

MR BARR (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Minister for Trade, Investment and the Knowledge Economy, Minister for Tourism and Events, and Minister for Major Projects) (5.40): The debate this afternoon confirms one thing in my mind: no-one reads the detail anymore and no-one listens to what anyone says in this place. You come in and read pre-prepared material—and we all do that in our first speeches—but now we actually have to respond. I will endeavour to do that to many of the quite spurious arguments that have been raised this afternoon.

I acknowledge I am in a position of having more information because I was in the national cabinet meeting that determined the need for the national framework. It might be useful to share with members why that occurred and then why we are having an ACT one, if that were not already clear from the media at the time, the communique from those meetings, the several media interviews I did, and the media release I put out subsequent to that meeting. To be clear, in relation to the case for a national data centre framework—primarily about managing infrastructure impacts consistently across jurisdictions—there is definitely an agreement across the nation that large data centres will create material energy, water and land use impacts, and that they therefore require a nationally consistent approach. Part of the discussion in that meeting was to avoid a race to the bottom, which is included in some of the concerns that I have heard expressed.

I will cast some aspersions on Queensland and the Northern Territory, as I did in the meeting, in that they insisted on being able to power data centres in their jurisdiction through the Beetaloo gas reserve in the Northern Territory and Queensland's state-owned energy generators. The rest of us did not agree with that, but they are sovereign jurisdictions, so they are able to make their own decisions. Avoiding the race to the bottom was a reason the Prime Minister brought it forward to the national cabinet and why we got an agreement to endeavour to create a common baseline.

The next most important element was managing electricity demand. That is particularly

important so that new energy loads are visible early to network planners across the nation, system reliability is maintained, and energy infrastructure is built efficiently. There was then a further discussion in relation to protecting water resources, which is where the ACT's position in relation to closed-loop cooling, water-efficient design and transparency around water consumption was discussed.

The next most important area was coordinating land use planning, recognising that these facilities are industrial scale. We can have debates about washing machine size and little racks of servers, but we are talking about industrial-scale sites, which is why our existing planning framework that locates them in industrial zones has been in place and why it should be protected. We do not need to change it, because it is already there, and that is why the data centres that are in the ACT are located there. That is important because it is relevant to where the existing high-voltage electricity connections are and where there is fibre connectivity.

Then—and I touched on this extensively in my remarks—there is a very important element about sovereign capability. The national cabinet communicated very clearly on that, linking data centre standards with both the broader AI regulatory framework that the commonwealth is working on and the many national interest objectives. There is also the question that Mr Milligan's amendment touches on, which is to provide some degree of certainty for investors.

Now to the moratorium question. There are two DAs currently before the Planning Authority. They have to be assessed under the current arrangements, but they are for extensions to existing facilities. There are about 15 data centres in the ACT, so we are not going to have 10,000 of them suddenly emerging. We are not in the market for that. That is not this jurisdiction's strength. I went to great lengths in my remarks to outline the sorts of data centres and their massive public benefit, and it is significant. Hundreds of thousands of jobs in this city rely almost entirely on data centres to be undertaken in any productive form, and it is the fastest area of growth in our economy. We all sit here, and we spent two weeks debating the need to diversify our economy—to have more jobs, more investment and all of the things that will fund—yet we come to this debate and there is an endeavour to try to shut it all down. I just cannot reconcile that.

Of course we need to manage appropriately against the frameworks and the principles and everything that this jurisdiction stands for. The reason we are attracting much of the data centre development that we have to date, and will in the future, is that we have 100 per cent renewable electricity, we have all of those national institutions, the presence of the Australian government, and sovereign data capability. That is the market for data centres in Canberra. If we lose any of that, we will lose our market edge. It is entirely counterproductive to think that we are going to go down the path of coal-fired or gas-fired data centres. Of course we are not.

My amendments are very clear about all of these elements—in terms of transparency, supporting renewable energy use, energy efficiency, water efficiency and innovation in infrastructure design—and also about ensuring appropriate community consultation and engagement. It is all in my amendments, but no-one read them, seemingly, given the speeches that we have heard this afternoon, and that is the disappointing element.

I know it is Thursday afternoon. We have all been here for what seems like an eternity

over this fortnight, and, yes, I am just a bit edgy and cranky, like everyone else, if that is not already clear. But what I am trying to do—on behalf of the jurisdiction that has the most to gain here, given our economy—is to steer this through in a way that is going to be the best in the nation, and we will exceed the national benchmark. We already do, and the point I made in national cabinet is that we are comfortable with that and that we would exceed that. And that we would compete against the Northern Territory and Queensland on the basis that our data centres would be renewably powered, they would be efficient, and they would generate public good, because those are exactly the sorts of data centres that we have in this city.

For those reasons, given all of the commitments we have made and the work that we are doing, and that we will bring a framework back—you will all get the chance to tell me I am the worst person in the world again; you will no doubt do it—

Mr Parton: Not quite the worst, I don't reckon.

MR BARR: All right. I will not go down that path. Everyone will get the opportunity to look at the actual framework, and the national one, and then the actual outcomes.

Mr Parton: I was with you, mate.

MR BARR: Thank you, Mark. On your birthday, I appreciate that. I will take this rare moment of consensus on that point. What is in my amendments—building on Mr Milligan's amendment—gives us a sensible pathway forward. People will have a further opportunity, no doubt, to debate this. What I am endeavouring to do is to deliver on the commitment that I made at national cabinet and I have made to the community—that it builds on our already nation-leading work. For those reasons, we will not be supporting the plethora of other amendments that seek to either just add one more brick or re-insert things that were taken out by the other two amendments.

Mr Emerson: Did you read them, though? They are pretty good.

MR BARR: Yes; I have. I have read them all, back and forth multiple times with everyone. Some arrive earlier than others and might give you even a day to consider them. Others, in usual tradition, arrive just as you are sitting at your desk. But, yes, I have read them. I do not believe they add any value to what is already in my amendments to Mr Milligan's amendment. For those reasons, and for the reasons of simplicity, getting on with this and doing what we said we would do, I do not support either Mr Emerson's or Miss Nuttall's amendments, with the greatest of respect, and I encourage members to support my amendments to Mr Milligan's amendment.

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (5.50): On the motion and amendments and in support of Miss Nuttall and Mr Emerson's amendments, I think it is excellent that government is thinking about this issue. I regret that government seems unable to think about this issue and express themselves in a calm way. I think we are hearing that the ACT already have the best standards.

Mr Barr: Point of order.

MR SPEAKER: I must admit I missed the precise words. You said the government is

not expressing itself in a calm way.

MS CLAY: I said that I regret the government seems unable to express themselves in a calm way. I am happy to withdraw that.

What we seem to be debating about is Labor and the Liberals saying that we have the best environmental standards in the country, we have closed-loop water, we are only going to use water that we do not need for other purposes and we will use it sustainably, we will only be using 100 per cent renewable electricity that we do not need for other purposes as we electrify, moving in to a hotter climate and needing more electricity—we are told that Canberra already does this, yet these amendments have removed all of those regulatory requirements. It is hard for me to understand why they are stating that we need to lock these in in regulatory requirements if we already do them. Why does that need to be removed from this? It is quite difficult to understand.

We have amendments that say we will have transparency around these issues. Having information around them is good. Having information is not the same thing as saying we will only use water and electricity that we do not need for other purposes and we will use it sustainably. That is the minimum standard. Having transparency just means you report after the fact how you did it. They are actually two different things.

We do not understand why government would not consider levies or other ways to get public benefits within our community from data centres. We hear that there are likely to be jobs—that is fantastic to hear—but we are looking at taxing. We saw a health levy last year on every household. We are putting up rates. The Greens have put up a big corporations tax that the government has enacted. We are looking at lots and lots of revenue opportunities from lots and lots of different sources. Why would we not consider revenue opportunities here for the territory rather than simply facilitating an industry that is the quickest growing in the economy at the moment without considering local benefits? Why does this need to be edited out?

The most chilling thing that has been edited out of these amendments, though, as Miss Nuttall pointed out, is First Nations consultation. If we are talking about making decisions on land, particularly land that is not currently used for other purposes, we have to have First Nations consultation in there. If we are not letting First Nations people lead, we do not even know enough about cultural sites and cultural uses to be able to make those decisions for other people. We should not be doing that.

The amendments here from the Chief Minister remove the fact that the Canberra community is concerned about this. Why are Labor and the Liberals stating that the Canberra community is not concerned? They are concerned. That does not mean you run away and hide from those concerns; that means you engage with them in a really great, rational way. You listen to the concerns, you work through the concerns, you change the way you are doing things, you make sure you have got good protections, you engage with the concerns. Why are we editing out the fact that the Canberra community is concerned about data centres? That is absolutely obvious for anyone who has been watching.

I am finding this debate baffling, but I think maybe this is an indication of the fact that we have two parties that do not even want to acknowledge there are community

concerns is possibly why a lot of people in the community are turning away from those two parties.

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (5.54): This is going to be a bit surreal. Usually when I stand up and reflect on what the Chief Minister has to say I am either disagreeing with what he has said—a long time ago—but pointing out how much he has failed or I am pointing out that he is on the wrong track. Today, I am afraid I have to agree with a whole lot of what he has just said. I would like to try and give him some faith that someone at least is paying attention to what is being said.

I have all four amendments as well as the original text of this motion arrayed in front of me. I think actually I will try and give some context to something that Mr Barr raised, because he seems to be unsure why it was that indeed the Greens seemed unable to address the context of his amendment and the context of his comments. I think it actually comes through in something that Miss Nuttall said, because I think Miss Nuttall may have let the cat out of the bag when she said that actually this is not about data centres. I think she may have let the cat out of the bag when she suggested that perhaps it is about who gets the profits. She had a lot to say about tech bros. I get it; they are an easy target. But that is a pretty dangerous way to make a policy. The politics of envy is dangerous. It means you can make some really bad decisions. That is absolutely exemplified in where we would be heading were these amendments to get up.

The amendment that the Greens have presented and Mr Emerson has so passionately backed—actually what that would do is make it so that only the big data centres could navigate such a complicated and strict regulatory regime by simply including a specific requirement that they must use closed loop. I also want to point out that in this place I believe there is one qualified engineer with the Greens, but there is no qualified engineer with expertise in data centres or expertise in heating—full expertise in all of the electricals required. The reason I make that point is because innovation depends on flexibility. If you restrict things too much, you stop the innovation. Just that one little clause in this motion would actually—if you have that positive requirement, they must use this thing—restrict some really good, innovative approaches.

Hetzner—I think they are in Germany and Finland—are an amazing company. They are a pretty small business. They are not one of the big guys. They have these modular data centre construction approaches with high server utilisation. They reuse waste heat to warm offices. They use onsite renewable generation, renewable electricity, highly efficient power systems and hot-cold aisle separation to stop cooled air and heated air mixing, but they do not use water. They do not use water cooling at all. This is an entirely air-cooled facility. They are fantastic. They custom-build servers and data resources for small and big businesses around the world.

If you clamp down on data centres so much that they can only fit through this one little door that you craft, then you actually shut down the little guys; you shut down the innovative approaches. That is the sort of thing that we are hearing from the Greens and Mr Emerson. When you take a technical issue and you make the technical specifics political instead of enabling the experts in the public service, the experts in industry and the experts in the community to be the ones who are working together to create the way forward, then we have got a problem, because it is working with those groups together

that you can actually find sensible ways forward, a way that we can actually utilise these data centres and build the economy that we are going to be facing tomorrow. The economy is transforming very quickly. If we do not take steps to be at the forefront of it, we will be left behind.

Just imagine if you had used this approach of shutting down all sorts of innovation through overly strict regulation with the solar industry. What if you had a reactionary approach and said you can only ever put solar on rooftops? What if you had a reactionary approach to wind generation and said you cannot put wind generation in forests, you cannot create access to wind turbines through forests? Australia would not be in the position it is now in terms of renewable energy generation. This is why I was so pleased to see the amendment that came from Mr Milligan, because it strikes a healthy balance, supporting the way forward and making sure we can actually get a future which is both sustainable and prosperous.

Question put:

That **Mr Emerson's** amendment to **Miss Nuttall's** proposed amendment to **Mr Barr's** proposed amendment to **Mr Milligan's** proposed amendment be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes, 6

Andrew Braddock
Fiona Carrick
Jo Clay
Thomas Emerson
Laura Nuttall
Rebecca Vassarotti

Noes, 15

Andrew Barr
Peter Cain
Leanne Castley
Tara Cheyne
Ed Cocks
Jeremy Hanson
James Milligan
Deborah Morris
Suzanne Orr
Mark Parton
Michael Pettersson
Chris Steel
Rachel Stephen-Smith
Caitlin Tough
Taimus Werner-Gibbings

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Emerson's amendment to **Miss Nuttall's** proposed amendment to **Mr Barr's** proposed amendment to **Mr Milligan's** proposed amendment negated.

Question put:

That **Miss Nuttall's** proposed amendment to **Mr Barr's** proposed amendment to **Mr Milligan's** proposed amendment be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes, 6

Andrew Braddock
Fiona Carrick

Noes, 15

Andrew Barr
Peter Cain
Suzanne Orr
Mark Parton

Jo Clay
 Thomas Emerson
 Laura Nuttall
 Rebecca Vassarotti

Leanne Castley	Michael Pettersson
Tara Cheyne	Chris Steel
Ed Cocks	Rachel Stephen-Smith
Jeremy Hanson	Caitlin Tough
James Milligan	Taimus Werner-Gibbings
Deborah Morris	

Question resolved in the negative.

Miss Nuttall's proposed amendment to **Mr Barr's** proposed amendment to **Mr Milligan's** proposed amendment negated.

Mr Barr's amendment agreed to.

Question put:

That **Mr Milligan's** amendment, as amended, be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes, 15		Noes, 6
Andrew Barr	Suzanne Orr	Andrew Braddock
Peter Cain	Mark Parton	Fiona Carrick
Leanne Castley	Michael Pettersson	Jo Clay
Tara Cheyne	Chris Steel	Thomas Emerson
Ed Cocks	Rachel Stephen-Smith	Laura Nuttall
Jeremy Hanson	Caitlin Tough	Rebecca Vassarotti
James Milligan	Taimus Werner-Gibbings	
Deborah Morris		

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Mr Milligan's amendment, as amended, agreed to.

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (6.09): In closing, I heed Mr Barr's point that no-one is listening to each other. I will not talk about whose press release started that one, but he makes a genuine point. I have listened to Mr Barr's words. I have heeded them. I appreciate the extra detail and the slow voice that he and other members used at times to make sure I understood. I still did not hear in those words a reason that he would oppose Mr Emerson's or our amendments.

Our amendments did not reinsert a moratorium, so I do not understand what the sticking point was. If it was on the arrival time of said amendments, we had limited time, because despite providing them to Mr Barr a week ago, we got his proposed amendments yesterday afternoon, I believe, after asking. Perhaps nuance was lost via email, but we did our best. One day, I hope to understand, because I am earnestly trying to do so.

Going to Mr Cocks's point, if they had looked at the wording in our original motion, it asked that we "implement best practice water and energy efficiency as standard, currently closed-loop water use". There were options there, but that is okay.

This might be one of the most disappointing days that I have had in my three years in the Legislative Assembly. All over the world, communities of all political persuasions, from MAGA folks in rural Oklahoma to civil rights groups in South Africa, are speaking out against the deluge of data centres mushrooming in their midst. Canberra has an opportunity not just to avoid the worst, but to create the best.

Here is an investment opportunity for you: turn Canberra into a place where regional, national and international delegations come to learn about the right way to bring data centres into a community, about how to not just minimise the damage, but actively use the data centre to improve both our budget bottom line and our quality of life, and learn how to say no to any data centre that is not offering enough to our community.

I am sorry, but those delegations are not going to come now. Politicians, activists and public servants from elsewhere in Australia and across the globe will not be poring over our legislation and frantically taking notes. Tourists will not be complimenting our city on how well we have done at keeping the ugliness of data centres out of sight.

Today, here in this Assembly, a majority, made up of both Labor and Liberals, have chosen to hand off all that potential opportunity to some other, more enlightened jurisdiction—maybe Queensland. A majority, made up of both Labor and Liberal, have turned their back on the Canberra pride that we have justifiably felt over other innovations: our renewable energy and steps to get off gas, our regenerating wetlands, our response to COVID, our safe, clean city.

It is such a lost opportunity. The ACT could have been real leaders on this. Instead, the Liberals have given their usual kneejerk support to the big end of town—actually, not even just the big end of this town, the big end of the planet. They are clearly happy for the ACT to become a colonial outpost for the Musk, Altman and Bezos empires. Labor hid behind its usual fig leaf of being ever so slightly less terrible than the Liberals.

Only the Greens, and Mr Emerson and Ms Carrick, actually did the work and will put Canberrans ahead of tech billionaires. Thank you to both of them for having humour, heart and integrity in this debate. Rest assured, we will do our utmost to make sure the electorate takes note of who was actually on their side.

With these amendments coming from Labor and Liberals now a foregone conclusion, the ACT Greens will be voting against our own motion, because it takes us backwards. In resolving to "engage with major domestic and international data centre operators", it undoes what I thought was the Chief Minister's genuine hard work to make us a leading jurisdiction. If I was a little bit pettier, I would sit down with my laptop and photoshop by hand a dodgy picture of a major data centre onto the western edge, with a still tasteful graphic of the Chief Minister in a hard hat.

Mr Speaker, you can see that the thought has crossed my mind. But that is not how the Greens want to do politics. We are not here to shitpost and score political points. Our community would be embarrassed with us if we did that, and they would lose faith in

politics. These amendments from the ACT Labor government and the Canberra Liberals opposition turn this motion into something that deals our community out and is worse than the status quo. This is not my motion anymore.

I am aware that there are people in the gallery, so I will keep this brief. It sucks. Today sucks. This Assembly had a huge opportunity, and Labor squandered it for petty party-political reasons that had nothing whatsoever to do with good government, good policy or good outcomes, and I am embarrassed.

Question put:

That the original question, as amended, be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes, 15		Noes, 6
Andrew Barr	Suzanne Orr	Andrew Braddock
Peter Cain	Mark Parton	Fiona Carrick
Leanne Castley	Michael Pettersson	Jo Clay
Tara Cheyne	Chris Steel	Thomas Emerson
Ed Cocks	Rachel Stephen-Smith	Laura Nuttall
Jeremy Hanson	Caitlin Tough	Rebecca Vassarotti
James Milligan	Taimus Werner-Gibbings	
Deborah Morris		

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Legislative Assembly—standing order 118AA(a)

Speaker's ruling

MR SPEAKER: In matters arising from question time, I was asked to rule on a couple of things. Mr Cocks raised one of his 118AAs, after Mr Cain had asked a supplementary question of the Minister for Housing and Homelessness. I will read from the *Hansard*. Mr Cain said, “Minister, is it the government’s position that a tent is a home for the purposes of the right to housing?” Following some, I would say, unhelpful points of order and unhelpful interjections, this was the answer:

Certainly, the government recognises that we would like to have everyone in housing. That is why we have the targets and the ambition we have to grow housing across the ACT. In recognising and achieving that target, we know that there are some people within our community who are very vulnerable who are experiencing homelessness, and helping them to realise housing is not just as straightforward as necessarily building a house and forcing them into it. That is why we have the pathway out of homelessness. We work with our community partners, and we work with services to build up those relationships with people who are experiencing homelessness to wraparound support to them and to help them move from homelessness to housing.

And that is what we have been doing. We have made significant investments in this most recent budget to our homelessness services as well as our housing. And we will continue to work at what is a very complicated social challenge for everyone, including us, but one that we are committed to and will continue to work towards resolving.

Mr Cocks raised a point of order under 118AA, claiming the minister was not responsive. In speaking to the point of order, the minister said:

... the question that was put was linked to the right to housing, and that would require, in my opinion or my view, a legal interpretation as to what the right to housing does or does not cover.

Members, this is a line-ball one that I have looked at, and it was not clear. I have had a good chat with the Clerk about it. With the right to housing in the Human Rights Act recent edition, I do not believe that, in every case, there is uncertainty in the law. The question was about the government's position. I determined that the minister was not responsive; but, in saying that, Minister, it was a line-ball one, and I would ask you to have a look at that and provide an answer. I understand that I am asking you to do this, and I note that it could have gone either way.

Legislative Assembly—standing order 117

Speaker's ruling

MR SPEAKER: At the conclusion of question time, Dr Paterson asked me to look at whether Mr Emerson had misled the parliament and made a false imputation that Dr Paterson had misled ABC Radio listeners. Mr Emerson's question was:

My question is to the Minister for Gaming Reform. You said on ABC Radio last week that the Labor Party has not accepted donations from the Labor Club in over a decade now, but in the last 10 years ACT Labor has received \$109,878 worth of free facilities use and other gifts in kind from the Canberra Labor Club which are considered donations under our electoral laws. Minister, do you accept that you misled listeners?

A transcript of the ABC interview which Dr Paterson provided confirms both that the question asked of Dr Paterson was in the context of money and that she said the words that Mr Emerson quoted. It was open to Mr Emerson to consider that it was possibly misleading, and it was open to Dr Paterson to consider it, in the context in which she qualified her comments, as explained in subsequent exchanges.

Ultimately, I am not ruling on whether it was misleading or not. That is a matter for the Assembly. After the exchanges that happened, if someone wants to bring a substantive motion, that is a matter for them. I can, however, rule on whether it is an imputation under standing order 117(b)(iv). With respect to simply asking whether or not a matter was misleading, I do not think there was an imputation, so I am not ruling that out of order.

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.

Paper

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Education, Minister for Child Development and Wellbeing, Minister for Finance, Minister for the Public Service, and Minister for Health Infrastructure) (6.21): I indicated at the end of question time that I would table a document from which I had been reading. I present the following paper:

Multi-Hazard Risk Assessment—Education Directorate 2027 School Resourcing Realignment and associated activities, dated 10 September 2026.

In doing so, I want to clarify that this is the version of the multi-hazard risk assessment that I received directly from the union. I had not been formally briefed, and I have still not been formally briefed, because this version of the risk assessment is a draft, and it is undergoing consultation and review. I would ask any members in this place who are going to use information from this tabled document, which I am tabling in good faith, to ensure they understand that this is a draft. It is already out of date, and it is continuing to be the subject of consultation.

Hate crimes and vilification review—final report Ministerial statement

MS CHEYNE (Ginninderra—Manager of Government Business, Attorney-General, Minister for City and Government Services, and Minister for Transport) (6.22): I present the following papers:

Hate Crimes and Vilification Review—

Final Report, undated.

Ministerial statement, 24 September 2026.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the ministerial statement.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (6.23), by leave: I table the speech that I was planning to deliver, in response to the ministerial statement:

Hate Crimes and Vilification Review—Response to ministerial statement—Mr Braddock, undated.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Canberra Institute of Technology—governance review

Ministerial statement

MR PETTERSSON (Yerrabi—Minister for Business and Industry, Minister for Arts, Creative Industries and the Night-Time Economy, Minister for Children, Youth and Families, Minister for Multicultural Affairs, and Minister for Skills, Training and Industrial Relations) (6.23): I rise to update the Assembly on the review into the governance arrangements for the Canberra Institute of Technology. As the ACT's largest VET provider and our sole public TAFE, CIT is the cornerstone of vocational education and training in our city. Each year, thousands of students get the skills that they need to succeed in their career. Their success is central to our city's future. Whether it is a nurse in one of our hospitals, an electrician working on a home or an early childhood educator teaching our next generation, our daily lives rely on CIT graduates.

Recent events, understandably, have led to questions about governance and oversight at CIT. Many in the community, including in this Assembly, have shared their concerns and made clear their view that the status quo is unacceptable. That is why I announced a review of CIT's governance. Through this review, we will fundamentally consider the structure and purpose of public VET provision in the ACT.

This review will investigate how we ensure public vocational education achieves its purpose and objectives. Most importantly, we will ask how we can meet expectations of our community and our students. As Canberra continues to grow and evolve, so too will the demand for skilled and adaptable workers. Meeting that demand will require a strong VET sector that is ready to develop and strengthen our workforce.

Before I outline our approach to this review, I want to state what this review is not. This review is not looking to reinvent the way we teach vocational education. Despite recent events, CIT's hardworking teachers have continued to deliver for their students. The data is clear: CIT excels in teaching and learning. Each day, CIT's teachers and the staff who support them are equipping students with the skills they need to succeed in life. I have been buoyed by the continued dedication to learning shown at CIT, undeterred by recent events. We owe it to these staff and students to ensure the settings are right to support them in the innovation and dedication they show every day.

With that in mind, the review will be forward-looking. Previous inquiries, reviews and scrutiny processes will, naturally, be considered, but CIT's future does not lie in its past, so the governance review will not re-litigate past controversies. We must find a path forward for CIT, one that rebuilds community confidence and enables it to get on with the job of teaching our future workforce.

The review will consider possible structures for public vocational provision. It will consider what kind of oversight, accountability and decision-making should underpin it, and how to ensure that these elements form a coherent framework.

I have written to my counterparts in all other jurisdictions, our local tertiary institutions, CIT staff and students, through their unions and student association respectively, and research bodies in the VET sector. In my correspondence, I outlined the terms of reference for this review and sought their engagement throughout the process. The initial response has been encouraging, and I am confident that the review will draw from experiences and perspectives across the country.

In seeking their engagement, I hope to build on the collaboration we have seen through the National Skills Agreement. As I have outlined to the Assembly previously, the National Skills Agreement has represented a generational investment in skills and training for the ACT. This has funded initiatives such as the TAFE Centre of Excellence for Cybersecurity, research into VET qualification completions, and foundation skills training.

Whilst these are vital investments, the National Skills Agreement has always been more than a funding initiative. It represents a commitment to collaboration between governments to build a stronger VET sector and ensure that our public providers are set up to play their part in a harmonised tertiary sector, through both stronger partnerships with other public TAFEs, through initiatives such as the National TAFE Network, and closer relationships with higher education providers.

National policy settings recognise the benefits of a more integrated tertiary education system, and this is guiding work occurring across governments, TAFEs and universities to explore closer partnership models. It is important that, in exploring these opportunities, we recognise the parity of esteem between vocational education and higher education. Both are a unique offering that should complement each other. Partnership must start from a place of two equals, joining with a shared interest in student outcomes. Tertiary harmonisation is a key part of the response to the 2024 Universities Accord. We know that there are barriers between vocational and higher education that do not reflect the needs of learners.

Canberra is the most educated city in Australia and, in no small part, this is due to the quality of our tertiary institutions and the partnerships they share. This sector is going from strength to strength, with the expansion of UNSW into the city, and increasingly close relationships between higher education and TAFE, making progress towards tertiary harmonisation.

We see this through initiatives such as guaranteed pathways to university study for CIT graduates at the University of Canberra in areas such as accounting, nursing and early childhood, or through CIT's partnership with the Australian Film, Television and Radio School that allows CIT's screen and media students to undertake advanced studies at one of the country's most renowned media institutions. These partnerships simplify recognition of prior learning requirements, acknowledging that the strong technical skills and knowledge gained from a vocational qualification can complement university qualification.

CIT will continue to form these kinds of partnerships, both in providing pathways into higher education, where it is the logical next step for a vocational graduate, and in providing training in technical subjects for university graduates to gain the skills they need in their career.

It is in this context that the governance review takes place. Shortly, I will table a copy of the discussion paper that I will be sharing with stakeholders for input. This paper examines in detail current arrangements for CIT, what governance arrangements exist across other public VET providers, and what range of governance models exist across ACT government.

Importantly, the discussion paper is intended to facilitate discussion rather than advance a preferred solution. It asks questions as to what the overarching purpose and objectives of CIT should be. It examines what role CIT should play within the broader ACT VET sector and, importantly, it asks how CIT will need to respond to future challenges and opportunities in building a harmonised tertiary sector.

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.

MR PETTERSSON: There is no one way to run a TAFE. Across Australia, we see the many different forms that vocational training can take. As the discussion paper explores, TAFEs operate with a diversity of board structures, legislated objectives, ministerial control and educational specialisations. These arrangements reflect the needs of their communities and have evolved over decades, just as CIT has in Canberra. As we look to the future of our tertiary sector, there exists immense opportunity to harness the unique abilities of each tertiary institution and explore how they can best complement each other.

Over the coming months, the government will engage with stakeholders on the discussion paper, seeking submissions in response to the questions it poses. We will prepare a listening report to detail what we have heard and, from there, we will establish a panel of experts in vocational education governance. This expert panel will be tasked with developing alternative governance arrangements for CIT that will be considered by government.

This is the process we have developed for the governance review, and I am pleased to share it with the Assembly. I have also been pleased to provide updates or information about this process, including the terms of reference, to interested members of the Assembly when they have been requested. But it is fair to say that there is no shortage of ideas for CIT's future.

I was a little surprised to see the Standing Committee on Economics, Industry and Recreation announce its own inquiry into governance arrangements at CIT earlier this month. I was also surprised to see no acknowledgement, in either the terms of reference for the inquiry or the supporting media release, that the government had already announced and commenced its own review. It remains a little unclear to me how the committee intended these processes to align in the best interests of vocational education in the ACT. Nevertheless, I welcome the Assembly's interest in this matter, and I look forward to the inquiry's recommendations.

While we had initially planned to have the listening report finalised towards the end of this calendar year, in the interest of ensuring that these review processes can complement each other, we will now wait for the committee's recommendations to make sure that the Assembly's views are considered at this early stage. Together, the views of the Assembly, sector experts, other states and territories, and CIT staff and students will assist us to identify alternative governance arrangements to be examined in more detail by the expert panel.

CIT has played a central role in the development of our city for almost a century now. From early beginnings as the Telopea Park Technical Trades School in 1928, CIT has been the cornerstone that has trained the workforce we need to run this city. As we enter a new chapter for CIT, harnessing the wider reforms underway in our tertiary sector, we want to ensure that CIT remains well positioned to continue this legacy. This governance review will provide a chance to step back and consider what the future of CIT will look like, and what opportunities exist. At its core, this work aims to restore confidence in our public VET provision. I look forward to keeping the Assembly informed as this review advances.

I present the following papers:

Canberra Institute of Technology Governance Review—Discussion Paper.

CIT Governance Review—Ministerial statement, 24 September 2026.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the statement.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Multicultural affairs—multiculturalism

Ministerial statement

MR PETTERSSON (Yerrabi—Minister for Business and Industry, Minister for Arts, Creative Industries and the Night-Time Economy, Minister for Children, Youth and Families, Minister for Multicultural Affairs, and Minister for Skills, Training and Industrial Relations) (6.34): I present the following paper:

2026 Ministerial Statement on Multiculturalism—Ministerial statement, 24 September 2026—

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (6.33), by leave, presented the following paper:

2026 Ministerial Statement on Multiculturalism—Response—Ms Barry, undated.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (6.34), by leave: I hereby present the following paper:

2026 Ministerial Statement on Multiculturalism—Response—Mr Braddock, undated.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

National Child Protection Week—2026

Ministerial statement

MR PETTERSSON (Yerrabi—Minister for Business and Industry, Minister for Arts, Creative Industries and the Night-Time Economy, Minister for Children, Youth and Families, Minister for Multicultural Affairs, and Minister for Skills, Training and Industrial Relations) (6.35): I present the following paper:

National Child Protection Week 2026—Ministerial statement, 24 September 2026—

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Statements by members

Belconnen Library—emergency evacuation

MS CHEYNE (Ginninderra—Manager of Government Business, Attorney-General, Minister for City and Government Services, and Minister for Transport) (6.35): I rise briefly to recognise the small but truly lovely act of public service at Belconnen library last week. On Monday, there was an evacuation at a neighbouring building which left around 50 to 60 children, their educators and their cots gathered outside the library. Library staff Zoe and Billy immediately offered them a safe place inside. They did not simply open the doors; they held an impromptu Giggle and Wiggle session. They read stories, they provided colouring-in, and they kept checking that everyone was comfortable while parents arrived to collect their children.

The following day, the children returned with beautiful handmade cards to say “thank you” for providing them with a safe and happy space. This is Canberra’s public service at its best: responsive, compassionate and focused on community. Thank you to Zoe, Billy and the entire Belconnen library team for providing safety, reassurance and a little joy when it was needed most.

I also note that I dropped in to the Giggle and Wiggle that is now being held on Saturdays at Belconnen library just this past weekend, and it was a joy to be there and to observe it, Mr Speaker.

Legal Aid—Domestic Violence Unit

MS VASSAROTTI (Kurrajong) (6.36): I would like to quickly highlight to the Assembly the work of the Legal Aid Domestic Violence Unit. Every morning people make their way to our local court. It is just a short walk away from this place, and they find their way to the Domestic Violence Unit and wait there. They come for free legal advice and protection. Legal Aid lawyers there work in the Early Intervention Legal Practice, which aims to help vulnerable people identify and resolve, at an early stage, their legal problems.

The paralegals and lawyers in this practice work tirelessly to support, advise and represent clients. The practice also runs a free service assisting families with family law matters in other courts, who have been affected by family violence. They run outreach

services at two hospitals as part of the Health Justice Partnership. They also have a dedicated duty lawyer for parents in child protection matters.

I wanted to bring this great work to the attention of the Assembly and to congratulate Legal Aid and the Early Intervention Legal Practice for the amazing work they do with very limited resources.

Dementia Action Week

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (6.37): I rise today to acknowledge Dementia Action Week and the thousands of Australians living with dementia, as well as the families, friends and carers who walk alongside them. Dementia can change many things in a person's life, but it does not change their fundamental worth, their identity or their right to be treated with dignity and respect. Behind every diagnosis is a person with a lifetime of experiences, relationships, achievements and memories. And alongside them are often family members and carers quietly taking on enormous responsibilities, providing care, reassurance and companionship every day.

Here in Canberra, healthcare professionals, community organisations, volunteers and carers do remarkable work supporting people living with dementia and helping them to remain connected to their communities. Creating a dementia-friendly Canberra is something all of us can contribute to, Mr Speaker. Sometimes that simply means showing a little more patience, taking the time to listen, understanding that someone may communicate differently and continuing to include them. Dementia Action Week reminds us to see the person first, not the diagnosis, and to ensure that people living with dementia remain valued, respected and included in our community.

Lake Tuggeranong Lions Club—Operation Formal Wear

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) (6.39): I rise today to acknowledge the remarkable work of Lake Tuggeranong Lions Club Operation Formal Wear, a community initiative ensuring that no young person misses out on their school formal because of the cost of clothing and accessories.

Last weekend, Operation Formal Wear held a pop-up event at St John Paul II College in Nicholls, providing students with access to quality formal wear free of charge. The success of the event was made possible by the generosity of donors, volunteers and the support of the school staff and students, who helped sort, organise and showcase donated items.

This initiative is about much more than clothing. It is about dignity, inclusion and ensuring every young person can participate in an important milestone alongside their friends. At a time when many families continue to experience cost-of-living pressures, programs like Operation Formal Wear provide practical support while strengthening community connections.

But the work is not over yet. Donations continue to be collected ahead of the main Operation Formal Wear in Kambah next month from 9 to 11 October. More students

will have the opportunity to find an outfit for their special occasion. Every donated dress, suit, pair of shoes or accessory has the potential to make a meaningful difference in a young person's life.

I thank everyone involved in Operation Formal Wear for their generosity, commitment and community spirit. Through their efforts, they are helping ensure that no student misses out on their formal simply because they cannot afford the outfit. This is a wonderful example of our community at its very best.

Discussion concluded.

Adjournment

Motion (by **Ms Stephen-Smith**) proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

Mrs Margaret McCulloch—tribute

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Education, Minister for Child Development and Wellbeing, Minister for Finance, Minister for the Public Service, and Minister for Health Infrastructure) (6.42): I rise today to acknowledge the life and contribution of Margaret McCulloch, known to many as Marg, a remarkable Canberra health consumer advocate who dedicated much of her life to ensuring that the voices and experiences of patients were heard.

I would like to acknowledge Margaret's husband Dennis, and her two children, Ross and Alison. I am pleased that Dennis and Ross have been able to join us in the Assembly today and hope that they have enjoyed the lengthy debates preceding the adjournment. To Dennis, Ross and Alison, I offer my deepest sympathies on your loss and thank you for your support in ensuring that Margaret's contribution to Canberra's community is being recognised and remembered in this place.

I also acknowledge Suzanne Newnham, who initially drew my attention to Marg's passing and the importance of her contribution.

Mr Speaker, Margaret McCulloch was a strong and respected advocate. She served as a consumer representative on several ACT health committees, including for the pain management unit. In those roles, she consistently championed the consumer perspective, reminding clinicians and decision-makers that behind every referral, diagnosis and treatment plan is a person whose experience matters. Margaret understood the value of bringing clinicians and consumers together. Her own lived experience gave her a particularly powerful insight into what it means to navigate the health system while living with chronic pain. Her contribution helped strengthen the partnership between patients and health professionals and reinforced the importance of designing services around the needs of the people who use them.

Margaret's advocacy grew out of her own experience. Following a knee operation, Margaret developed severe and persistent nerve pain, which she described as a burning sensation accompanied by electric shocks in her toes. It took considerable time to find the help she needed, and the experience left her determined that other people living with

chronic pain should not have to face that journey alone. When Margaret looked for peer support in Canberra, she could not find a broadly-based support group for people living with persistent pain, so she created one.

In 2010, Margaret helped establish Pain Support ACT. The first meeting attracted 15 people. What began as a small support group grew into an organisation providing information, advocacy, peer support and regular meetings, where experts could speak with members about pain, treatment and wellbeing. Margaret became the driving force behind that work. She worked collaboratively with other organisations and people who shared the goal of improving the lives of those living with chronic pain. Her contribution was recognised when she received the ACT Community Service Volunteer Award in 2014.

Eventually, when Margaret could no longer continue the work herself and no successor could be found, she ensured that the project would not simply disappear. Pain Support ACT joined with Arthritis ACT, which shared many of its interests, allowing the support and advocacy for people living with chronic pain to continue. That, I think, says a great deal about Margaret. She did not simply identify a problem. She used her own experience, listened to others and set about doing something practical to make things better.

Margaret was a strong believer in the value of patient experience in developing effective and efficient health services. She understood that consumers bring knowledge that cannot be gained solely from textbooks, clinical practice or statistics. Her legacy is the people whose experiences were heard, the consumers who found support, and the health professionals and services that benefited from having patients' voices at the table—and continue to do so.

I extend my sincere condolences to Margaret's family and friends, and to all of those who knew her and worked alongside her. I know this Assembly will learn from Margaret's contribution. Canberra is a better place and a better community because Margaret McCulloch chose to turn her own experience of adversity into advocacy for others. I thank her for that service.

ACT Landcare Awards

MS VASSAROTTI (Kurrajong) (6.45): I too would like to pass on my condolences to Margaret's family.

A few weeks ago I was very pleased to attend the ACT Landcare Awards. This is a great event, highlighting the work of environmental volunteers across Canberra. One of the most inspiring awards was the Junior Landcare Award, that was won by Telopea Park primary school in the Kurrajong electorate. Excitingly, one of the members of the Greens team that attended those awards was Grace Lee, who is here today with her family, who is also the ACT Greens' youngest member. We connected and spoke about her work and her passion for the environment. Since this time, Grace has been working with me to write this adjournment speech to let members know about some of the work that she has been involved in and her hopes and dreams of a more hopeful and sustainable future.

Grace is 11 years old. She attends Telopea Park School, a bilingual school in which she learns English and French. She has always loved the great outdoors and enjoys spending time with family and friends. Grace has a passion for nature and is always interested in helping the environment when it is in trouble. It was pretty incredible to find out that when Grace was about 2½ years old she was introduced to politics by her father Nathan, who is here. She quickly became interested, and at just five years of age she decided she wanted to become a member of the Greens despite coming from a rusted-on Labor family—pretty cool dad to bring up such an independently minded young person.

Grace has explained that she is a member of the eco-délégués, and these are the elected student representatives from her school whose job it is to maintain school sustainability and work together to help keep the school's natural environment clean and safe. In 2026 they have been mainly working on organising events such as plant fundraisers. They have raised thousands of dollars to help causes, including protecting endangered animals or cleaning the ocean. They are passionate about helping make the school a better place to be by helping nature, and they are led by their by a wonderful teacher Aurore Severac, who is also here, who Gracie says is “like the egg and the flour to our cake”.

All the hard work of the group and the teacher has been recognised by being honoured through not one but two major ACT environmental awards. The first award was the Moira and John Rowland Young Environmentalist Award. The award celebrates individuals or groups aged 28 or younger in the ACT region—in this case, quite a bit younger—who make an outstanding contribution to protecting local nature or advancing a safe climate future. The second award was the Junior Landcare Award. The award honours young individuals, school groups or kids' organisations that raise environmental awareness, practise biodiversity conservation and implement hands-on sustainability projects. Grace and the other eco-délégués were very excited to receive the awards, which were hosted at Capital Brewery and the National Portrait Gallery. They were particularly happy to hear more about the excellent work done by other award winners, and they all really enjoyed the pain au chocolat at the Portrait Gallery event.

Gracie says she feels lucky to live in Canberra, which has a great natural environment, access to bush and 100 per cent of energy coming from renewable sources. Unfortunately, not all places in Australia are like this, and there are growing pressures on the environment, including from data centres, which use a lot of energy and water. This was written before today.

Grace is keen to continue to learn about and raising awareness of these issues. While she is not sure what she will do when she finishes school, she is passionate about finding solutions to the issues, and maybe she will end up in politics. She really wants to spread the word to others, big or small, young or old, that can understand the situation and know what to do to help. For now, though, she has got a lot of homework to do and is planning to run for school captain next year.

Connecting with Grace through the awards process has been an awe-inspiring process and shows that young people are engaged, keen to contribute and already showing great leadership. If you get the chance, make sure to engage with the young people around you.

Mr Andrew Forster PSM—retirement as Floriade Head Gardener

MS CHEYNE (Ginninderra—Manager of Government Business, Attorney-General, Minister for City and Government Services, and Minister for Transport) (6.50): I recognise an extraordinary Canberran, Andrew Forster PSM, who is retiring after 40 years of service to our community. Across four decades Andrew has brought knowledge, skill and unmistakable passion to Canberra's gardens and public spaces. His contribution is visible throughout our city, but it is most famously expressed each spring when Canberra blooms through Floriade.

Andrew's connection with Floriade began before the event itself. In 1987, while completing his horticultural apprenticeship, Andrew was part of the CIT class involved in trials at Yarralumla Nursery, planting bulbs and testing their combinations and flowering times. The following year he helped establish the garden beds for the inaugural Floriade, measuring plants and marking out displays around Nerang Pool in Commonwealth Park. Andrew became head gardener in 1997, and he continued in that role until 2020. His career is therefore woven throughout almost the entire history of one of Canberra's most recognised and cherished events.

Visitors who flock to Floriade are seeing an end result. Andrew has seen and been part of everything required to create it: months of planning and planting; the careful sequencing of early, middle and late flowering varieties; Canberra's unpredictable weather; and the work of gardeners, designers, apprentices, volunteers and contractors. In his first year as head gardener Andrew was so concerned about getting everything finished that he sometimes slept overnight in the first aid room. He would get up at 5 in the morning, have breakfast with the security guards and then get straight back to work. I am pleased that one of the lessons Andrew now shares is the importance of work-life balance, and after 40 years retirement may finally give him the opportunity to practise it.

There were many memorable events and moments during Andrew's time at Floriade. In 2011 he had the privilege of the company of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II through the displays. There were weeks of additional preparation. You may recall that the Queen did not arrive until early November, well after Floriade had formally concluded, and so the additional preparation including deadheading flowers and refreshing paths. Andrew had ultimately around three minutes with the Queen. He described it as three minutes with Grandma.

Andrew also took Floriade to the world. In 2013 he represented the festival at the world summit in Istanbul, where he received the Order of the Tulip. In 2015 he attended the World Tulip Summit and international garden tourism network conference in South Korea. In 2020 Andrew helped deliver one of Floriade's most creative and important transformations. When COVID-19 meant the traditional festival could not proceed in Commonwealth Park, there was an issue: all the bulbs had been ordered—1 million of them, 1 million bulbs and annuals—what to do? We now know because there is a long legacy from this initiative. One million blubs and annuals were distributed across more than 130 sites around Canberra. After decades of bringing people to the flowers, Andrew and the team brough the flowers to the people. At a difficult time, those displays brought colour, optimism and renewal to communities throughout our city and

that initiative continues today.

Andrew's legacy is found in the people he supported. When Andrew began work, there were eight apprentices, and he was one of them. He has spoken about the mentors who invested in him, trusted him and helped him develop his craft. Throughout his career he has sought to do the same for others. His outstanding contribution was formally recognised in 2008 when he received the Public Service Medal for his work providing floral displays throughout Canberra, particularly Floriade.

Andrew Forster has spent 40 years making a more beautiful, welcoming and memorable city. Andrew did not simply plant flowers or maintain garden beds; he helped shape the way people experienced and remember Canberra. He helped ensure that visitors saw our city at its most colourful, creative and confident, and he gave Canberrans another reason to take pride in their city and visitors another reason to return. It is no exaggeration to describe Andrew as the man who helped Canberra bloom. I certainly wish with him and his family all the very best in his retirement, but I know he will still be busy.

Ovarian Cancer Research Foundation—Frocktober

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) (6.55): Thank you, Mr Speaker, and I appreciate it, Mr Cain.

It should come as no surprise that women's health is an issue close to my heart. In this place I have spoken often about the challenges women face, the conditions of undiagnosed symptoms that are dismissed and the gender gap in health care. But today I am not speaking about the issue; I am wearing it. Next month is Frocktober and for the ninth time I will be a "Frocker".

Every October Australians from all walks of life take part in Frocktober, the flagship fundraising campaign for the Ovarian Cancer Research Foundation, through dressing up and starting conversations and raising funds for life changing and lifesaving research. What began as a grassroots idea amongst friends has become one of Australia's most recognisable community fundraising campaigns.

For me, though, the connection to this cause is deeply personal. My grandmother had ovarian cancer, and she passed away when I was only 18 months old. So, while I have never really had the chance to know her, I have always been conscious of the impact this disease has had on my family.

Sadly, more than three decades later, ovarian cancer remains one of the most challenging cancers to detect and treat, with no reliable early detection tests and many of the symptoms easily mistaken for other common conditions. This means that too many women are diagnosed only after the disease has progressed, with the statistics being stark: the five-year survival rate is just 49 per cent.

And despite the impact ovarian cancer has on women, family and communities across Australia, research continues to be significantly underfunded, which is why the work

of the Ovarian Cancer Research Foundation is so important. Since 2000, they have invested more than \$37 million into ovarian cancer research projects, and last year Australians raised more than \$1 million through Frocktober.

This October, I will once again be frocking up and encouraging others to join me—whether you are going to wear a dress every day, like me, or donate, or hold a “frocktail” party or just have conversations with people in the community about what ovarian cancer is. I invite all my colleagues to participate in whatever way they can and to get involved in Frocktober and raise money for ovarian cancer research.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

The Assembly adjourned at 6.57 pm until Tuesday, 20 October 2026 at 10 am.

Questions without notice taken on notice

Land—Affordable Home Purchase Scheme

Mr Barr *(in reply to a question by Ms Carrick and a supplementary question by Mr Emerson on Wednesday, 23 September 2026):*

- a) Communication with Affordable Home Purchase Scheme buyers about signing the Application for a Certificate of Occupancy and Use was primarily the responsibility of the builder. The builder is not employed by the SLA. Buyers entered into a building contract directly with the builder, and the SLA is not a party to that contract.

SLA supported the builder's communications by providing buyers with information about the purpose, process and scope of the Certificate of Occupancy and Use.

- b) SLA is not a party to the building contract and is therefore not responsible for providing inspection or compliance reports to buyers.
- c) As SLA is not a party to the building contract, it cannot guarantee the timing or outcome of the completion of any home. SLA understands that homes will be completed and handed over in accordance with the contract between the builder and each buyer.

SLA expects all homes to be completed in line with the finishes and inclusions set out in the building contract. The SLA has a Project Delivery Deed with the builder and holds security to help ensure the homes are completed in accordance with the requirements of that deed.