



DEBATES
OF THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

DAILY HANSARD

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22 October 2026

This is an **EDITED PROOF TRANSCRIPT** of proceedings that is subject to further checking. Members' suggested corrections for the official *Weekly Hansard* are requested to be lodged in writing with the Hansard office no later than **Thursday, 13 November 2026**.

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Thursday, 22 October 2026

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

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

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

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

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

Legislative Assembly—continuing resolution 10

Statement by Speaker

MR SPEAKER (Mr Hanson) (10.01): Members, before I call the Clerk for petitions, in debate on Tuesday on Ms Barry's motion on sentencing law reform, the Deputy Speaker informed the Assembly while Mr Cocks was addressing the chamber that, due to sub judice rules, debate was not permitted if a case was within the 28-day window in which an appeal may be lodged. For the information of members, this is not the case. The continuing resolution states specifically at 1(c):

Appellate proceedings, whether criminal or civil, are active from the time when they are commenced by application for leave to appeal or by notice of appeal until ended by judgment or discontinuance.

The possibility of an appeal is not sufficient to enliven the sub judice principles adopted by the Assembly, although respect for the distinctive role of the courts should apply at all times.

Previous rulings by Speaker Berry in February 2007 and Speaker Burch in June 2023 highlight the discretion of the chair in this area. Members should be mindful of their language, particularly when discussing details of a case that may still be appealed. It was open to the Deputy Speaker to consider that Mr Cocks's comments at the time were beginning to reflect on the reasoning of the courts, but that was not the reason that was articulated at the time by the Deputy Speaker.

A further note for members is that continuing resolution 10 is closely modelled on the sub judice rules of the House of Commons. The committee of that House is currently concluding its review of sub judice rules, and any resulting reports can be used to inform the Assembly's upcoming review of standing orders.

Petition

The following petition was lodged for presentation:

Yerrabi pond—wildlife protection—petition 81-26

By Mr Braddock, from 744 residents:

To the Speaker and Members of the Legislative Assembly

The following residents of the ACT draw the Assembly's attention to the ongoing risks facing swans and other wildlife at Yerrabi Pond, Gungahlin.

On Saturday 22 August 2026, a father swan died attempting to protect his cygnet from an unleashed dog. The cygnet was taken to an emergency vet by ACT Wildlife, but died shortly after.

This occurred in full view of families and children, and was not an isolated incident—Yerrabi Pond has also seen a cygnet stolen in broad daylight and ongoing fox predation of its resident waterbird population.

Black swans are a fully protected native species under the Nature Conservation Act 2014, and dog attacks causing serious injury to an animal carry significant penalties under the Domestic Animals Act 2000.

Despite this, Yerrabi Pond currently lacks CCTV, has inconsistent signage, and has limited ranger presence to help prevent or respond to incidents involving its wildlife.

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

1. Ensure a full investigation into the 22 August incident, and pursue prosecution where appropriate under the Domestic Animals Act 2000 and Nature Conservation Act 2014;
2. Install clearer signage at Yerrabi Pond regarding on-leash requirements near wildlife habitat areas;
3. Increase ranger presence and patrols at Yerrabi Pond, particularly around known wildlife nesting and foraging areas;
4. Investigate the feasibility of CCTV at Yerrabi Pond to support public safety and wildlife protection;
5. Provide public signage discouraging the feeding of bread and food to waterbirds; and
6. Provide a public update on the status of the investigation into the 22 August incident.

Pursuant to standing order 99A, the petition, having at least 500 signatories, was referred to the Standing Committee on Transport and City Services.

The Clerk having announced that the terms of the petition would be recorded in Hansard and a copy referred to the appropriate minister for response pursuant to standing order 100, the petition was received.

Motion to take note of petition

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

That the petition so lodged be noted.

Yerrabi pond—wildlife protection—petition 81-26

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (10.03): On Saturday 22 August, two adult swans and their three cygnets were being admired by families at Yerrabi Pond, where they have been known to forage and nest. This was when a man approached the area with two dogs. One was on a leash and another, a smaller dog, was free to roam. One swan reacted and started honking in warning to protect its cygnets. The man was trying to call the smaller dog back but it grabbed one of the swans, taking it to the side in the grass, and started mauling it. During the ensuing chaos, the leashed dog then grabbed one of the cygnets. It all happened within a space of about 10 minutes and ended with the man then running from the scene with his two animals. ACT Wildlife was called and arrived to take the swan and the cygnet to an emergency vet but, sadly, they did not survive.

According to witnesses, one of the parents and the two cygnets were calling out. It was not honking; it was this really sad noise. Black swans are monogamous and can mate for life. It has also been documented that they can grieve. They are a fully protected native species under the Nature Conservation Act and the Animal Welfare Act. It is a crime to harm, catch or interfere with them. They are also subject to predation by foxes and human impacts at Yerrabi Pond.

I have previously raised concerns with the relevant minister about people abducting baby wild animals from the Yerrabi Pond area. It was this incident that sparked animal advocate and Forde resident Jo McKinley into action. Jo, who sadly was not able to join us in the gallery today, was the force behind this petition, and I thank her for her advocacy on this issue. She has called for a full investigation and potential prosecution of the man with the dogs. She also wants the ACT government to establish fully-enclosed off-leash dog areas at Yerrabi Pond, clearer signage about on-leash requirements in the area, increased ranger presence or patrols at Yerrabi Pond, public signage discouraging feeding of water birds, and a public update from the relevant government agency on the status of the case.

Yerrabi Pond currently lacks CCTV, has inconsistent signage and limited ranger presence to help prevent or respond to incidents involving the wildlife that also call the pond home. I hope this petition being tabled today helps address these shortfalls so that the wildlife at Yerrabi Pond can live in peace and continue to be admired by the local community.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

**Economy—Canberra attraction and retention strategy
Ministerial statement**

MR BARR (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Minister for Trade, Investment and the Knowledge Economy, Minister for Tourism and Events, and Minister for Major Projects) (10.05): I rise to update the Assembly on a new direction for Study Canberra and on the government's broader ambition to position Canberra as Australia's talent attraction capital.

For most of our history, Canberra's growth has rested on our role as the national capital,

and that, of course, remains one of our great economic strengths and always will. But, over the past 20 years, the city has also built one of the most sophisticated knowledge economies in the country, with real depth in higher education, research, cybersecurity, defence industries, digital technologies, health and professional services.

Canberra is going to continue to growing onwards towards the middle of this century. What matters is whether that growth brings more investment, more businesses, more good jobs to our economy and more opportunity for the people who come after us. We, of course, have no mine, resources or port to fall back on. Our advantage is people. Every sector where Canberra leads—education and research, engineering, cyber, health, technology and professional services—relies on talented people deciding to make their lives here. Attracting those people and keeping them sits at the centre of the work ahead. The talent is already here, and the numbers bear that out. We recorded around 25,000 new jobs in the four years to February 2025, and Canberrans now earn the highest average full-time wage of any state or territory. Skill is rewarded in this city.

That is the lens through which we look at higher education. International education has long been one of Canberra's success stories, and it underpins our standing as the nation's education capital. It is also an export industry in every sense, bringing skilled people, investment and global connections into our economy just as our other advanced industry sectors do. Close to 20,000 international students from more than 100 different countries study in Canberra each year. Together, they put around \$1.4 billion a year to the territory economy. That is roughly \$70,000 of economic contribution per international student. This, of course, supports tens of thousands of local jobs. Many stay on after they graduate and are going to work in areas of our economy where we are currently short of skilled people: in health, education, technology, engineering, construction and professional services. Fortunately for us, the sector is growing. International student commencements in the ACT are up close to 12 per cent from pre-pandemic periods, while several other jurisdictions have in fact gone backwards from that era.

Until now, Study Canberra has principally concentrated on bringing students to our institutions, and sensibly so, and that work has clearly succeeded and it must continue. But we are looking now at a wider measure of success. Students who arrive here to study in 2027 will become our future entrepreneurs, researchers, business owners, public servants and community leaders. Bringing them to Canberra is an important first step, but the bigger outcome is keeping them, so that a few years of studying in Canberra turns into careers, businesses and families that stay here in the territory. We want people to come to Canberra to learn, but to stay in Canberra to thrive. That is the kind of city Canberra is. There are few places in Australia that put education, work, community and opportunity so close together. Of course, a student today making a decision about where they will study is choosing more than just a university or a college; they are weighing up where they might build a future career, a circle of friends and a great life. We want Canberra to be a place that comes to mind in that decision-making.

Of course, governments and our higher education institutions cannot do this on their own. We need industry in this task with us. It is clear that students are far more likely to stay in Canberra when they can see a job in Canberra at the end of their degree. We will keep working with business and our institutions to expand internships, placements and graduate programs and to put employers in front of students well before they finish

their study. The focus will be on sectors where Canberra both needs workers and where we have a real comparative advantage—technology, cybersecurity, health, engineering, construction, defence, research and across the professional services. For businesses, why should they be involved? The return is a steady supply of skilled people, help to address skill shortages they might be facing, room to grow and, of course, a broader and more resilient local economy when this all comes together.

The government has its own part to play as one of Canberra's largest employers and I think, arguably, the most diverse employer in Australia, given our local and state government responsibilities. We need skilled graduates and young professionals in our workforce as much as anyone does. Future Study Canberra activity will give more weight to careers in the ACT public service across policy, digital and technology, health, education, planning, infrastructure, emergency services and environmental management, to name just a fraction of the opportunities of work in the ACT public sector. We will also tie our attraction work more closely to ACT workforce planning so that student recruitment, skills development and employment pathways are planned together, rather than left to line up by chance.

There are also our alumni. It is clear to me, over 20 years, that nobody makes the case for Canberra better than the people who came here to study and then chose to stay here. Their stories carry more weight than any marketing campaign, which is why we have asked our institutions to bring alumni in as ambassadors, mentors and advocates—here at home and overseas, where there are hundreds of thousands of graduates from Canberra's higher education system forging careers and relationships across the world.

We start from an incredibly strong position. We do have leading universities. We have extraordinarily deep research capability in this city. We have Australia's most highly skilled workforce. We are Australia's national capital. There is a strong defence and government presence in this city, not just the Australian government but diplomatic missions from more than 100 countries around the world. Our private sector is growing more sophisticated and building each year. More than 5,700 new businesses have opened in the ACT over the past four years, and that is the highest growth rate of any state or territory. Three in four Canberrans now work outside of the Australian government or the ACT government. The job now is to make those strengths work together—more students, more graduates staying in Canberra, more research turning into more new businesses, more private investment and the continuation of our trend towards more high-value jobs in the economy.

Nobody chooses where to live on just a salary alone. People think about housing, they think about getting around and how liveable the city is, culture, sport, places to eat, parks and open space, the environment that they live in and what their life might look like in 10 or 20 years. On that score, I think Canberra does have a strong story to tell. We are, of course, not immune to challenges that face every city in the world. But, for the second year running, the Oxford Economics Global Cities Index has ranked Canberra the first in the world for quality of life.

The approach that I have outlined this morning seeks to bring education, employment, skills, community and long-term opportunity together. We will be aligning student attraction with workforce development and population growth and strengthening the path from study into industry and lasting work. We will be asking more of industry in

keeping graduates here, making full use of our own position as a major employer and seeking to draw on our extensive alumni networks, and it will be backed by branding and communications that match the scale of what we are trying to do. Study Canberra has been a tremendously successful student recruitment program. It will now become a central part of how Canberra builds and keeps its workforce and for our ambition to be recognised as Australia's talent capital. In short: come to Canberra to learn; stay in Canberra to thrive. That is the government's proposition to students, workers and future Canberrans who will shape this city's next chapter. I commend this statement to the Assembly.

I present the following paper:

Canberra attraction and retention strategy—Ministerial statement, 22 October 2026.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

MR MILLIGAN (Yerrabi) (10.16): I agree: Canberra is full of talented people. We have world-class universities, innovative businesses, and young people with big ideas and ambitions for the future. I welcome the government's ambition to attract more talented people to Canberra and encourage them to stay. But attracting talent is only half the job. When someone moves to Canberra to study, they work hard, they earn their qualification and we hope that they fall in love with our city. We hope that they want to stay, to build a career and maybe buy a home and raise a family. But, when they graduate, they need somewhere to work, and that means we need businesses to grow, invest and create jobs.

The Chief Minister talks about working with industry to provide more opportunities for graduates, and that is a good thing. But we need to remember that businesses do not create jobs simply because the government asks them to. They create jobs when they have the confidence and the right settings to grow. When the local cafes are doing well enough to hire another worker, when a small construction company can afford to take on another apprentice or when a young entrepreneur can turn that idea into a successful business—these are the opportunities that will keep people in Canberra. Yet, at the same time, local businesses are telling us about rising costs, increasing rates and regulations that make it harder to get ahead. We cannot expect businesses to create more jobs while making it harder and more expensive for them to operate.

The government wants Canberra to become Australia's talented capital, to which I agree. I think we should aim even higher, though. Let's make Canberra Australia's innovation and opportunity capital, a place where people do not just come here to study but where they can build a business, create jobs and achieve their ambitions. The best way to keep talented people in Canberra is to give them a reason to stay, and that starts with backing the businesses that create these jobs and opportunities.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Cybersecurity—Cyber Security Action Month

Ministerial statement

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) (10.18): Before I turn to my circulated statement on Cyber Security Action Month, with the indulgence of the Assembly, I would like to acknowledge an incident that has been reported in the news today and recognise the important work of our public servants in Digital Canberra in responding to it.

Members will be aware of the critical vulnerability recently identified in the PHP programming language, which underpins a significant proportion of websites worldwide. This is a timely reminder that cybersecurity is fundamental to the safe and reliable delivery of digital services. Late yesterday, Digital Canberra was notified of the vulnerability by security partners and national authorities. The team promptly commenced assessment of the potential impacts and preparation to implement the vendor's software fix. Consistent with a risk-based approach, the government's priority is being given to critical and internet-facing services, with patches subject to testing, controlled deployment and verification. Where necessary, systems will be temporarily taken offline to enable fixes to be applied and validated safely before services are restored.

I acknowledge the dedication and professionalism of the Digital Canberra team in responding swiftly to this emerging threat. This response highlights the importance of strong partnerships with national cybersecurity authorities, effective monitoring and prompt action when vulnerabilities are identified. It also reinforces the rationale for establishing Digital Canberra: to provide coordinated leadership across the ACT government's digital technology, data and cybersecurity functions, and to ensure the systems and services Canberrans rely on remain secure, resilient and fit for the future.

Thank you very much to the Digital Canberra staff who have worked very hard overnight to address this issue and who are always on call overnight, on weekends and when incidents occur. They, as much as our frontline staff, are critical to ensuring the sustainability of our frontline services.

I rise this morning to mark Cyber Security Action Month and speak about the practical steps everyone can take to stay safer online. I will also update the Assembly on the ACT government's continuing work to deliver secure, resilient and reliable digital services. This year's national Cyber Security Action Month theme is "Take a second. Stay secure". It is a simple message, but an important one. That message matters because cybercriminals often rely on speed, distraction and pressure. They want us to click before we check, respond before we think or share information before we are sure of who is asking for it. Pausing for one second can interrupt that pattern and prevent real harm—something I am all too aware of myself.

The scale of the harm caused by scams and other cybercrime is clear. The National Anti-Scam Centre's reporting for 2026 to date shows that territorians have been affected by more than 3,700 reported scams, with losses exceeding \$4.7 million. More than half of those reports—52.5 per cent—involved contact through email or other online sources. This reinforces the importance of practical cybersecurity in every household,

workplace and community organisation. The good news is that staying safer online does not require everyone to become a cybersecurity expert. Small measures, applied consistently, significantly strengthen personal defences. The same principle applies to government. Effective cybersecurity needs strong foundations, a cyber-aware workforce, disciplined investment and practical action. The ACT government is continuing to strengthen the technology and governance processes that support public administration and the services Canberrans rely upon.

Central to this work is the establishment of Digital Canberra. Since 1 July 2025, digital and technology capabilities have been progressively brought together, strengthening the way the ACT government manages technology and delivers services to the community. This provides a stronger foundation for aligning technology investment with government and community priorities. Digital Canberra applies best-practice approaches to planning, design and delivery and helps ensure technology supports reliable, efficient and secure services for government and our community. Digital Canberra's Cyber Security Centre has led whole-of-government efforts to strengthen cybersecurity capability, maturity and resilience. The centre provides cyber threat detection and incident response capabilities across government while continuing to adapt to evolving threats.

Digital Canberra builds cyber awareness capability across the ACT public service with a range of training, guidance and support for staff. Activities such as simulated phishing exercises help staff recognise suspicious activity, make safer decisions and report potential threats early. Digital Canberra is also delivering practical modernisation. As the Windows 11 uplift program nears completion, the government is moving its workforce to a modern, secure and supported operating environment. Reducing reliance on legacy technology is essential to lowering cyber risk. I take this opportunity to give a shout-out to the Windows 11 project team, who have delivered this program on time and under budget while engaging across directorates and the workforce to minimise any disruption to services and day-to-day work.

The Payroll Capability and Human Resource Management Program is applying the same modernisation principle to critical workforce systems, supporting more than 33,000 ACT public service employees. Upgrades to HR platforms have improved integration, reduced technical complexity and maintained vendor support. Together, these changes are lowering legacy technology risk and strengthening the resilience of essential payroll and workforce services. In addition, the project has so far seen more than 9,000 staff transition to a modern, whole-of-government rostering, time and attendance system. Again, the team has done an incredible job in planning the program rollout and engaging across diverse areas of the workforce to implement this change which primarily impacts frontline staff.

We are also strengthening the security of services used directly by the community. The ACT government has achieved Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard compliance across a range of government payment services. This milestone strengthens the protection of payment information and reflects sustained collaboration among service owners, technology teams and cybersecurity specialists. Compliance is ongoing, and these controls must evolve as systems, services and threats change. The 2025-26 budget committed \$16.5 million over two years to strengthen cybersecurity resilience across government and advance compliance with the Australian

government's Security of Critical Infrastructure legislation. This investment is focused on strengthening our ability to identify and respond to cyberthreats, improving security across critical environments, supporting stronger management of vulnerabilities and technology supply-chain risks and improving the resilience of systems relied upon to deliver services to the community. This program of work is another important step in the ACT government's ongoing efforts to reinforce cybersecurity foundations across the service, to improve our preparedness for cyber incidents and to ensure resilience of critical services and the security of sensitive information of government and our community.

Strong cybersecurity also means preparing for emerging threats, as we have seen today. Artificial intelligence offers opportunities to improve analysis, identify vulnerabilities and bolster cyber defence. But we are all aware that it may also increase the speed, scale and sophistication of malicious activity. The government is monitoring these developments and working with commonwealth agencies, other jurisdictions, industry and cybersecurity experts to enhance our cybersecurity and resilience to emerging threats. We are also preparing for advances in quantum computing, which may compromise encryption methods currently used to protect sensitive information and secure communications in Australia and globally.

Transitioning our technology environment will take more than a second's pause; it will take time, careful planning and sustained vigilance. At the heart of this work is a clear purpose: to protect the information entrusted to the ACT government, ensure essential digital services remain available and maintain public confidence in the digital services we all depend on. But investment alone cannot remove every cyber risk. Technology changes, threats evolve and many attacks still begin by exploiting a moment of inattention. So, during Cyber Security Action Month, I encourage every Canberran to take one practical step today. Apply the update you postponed; turn on multifactor authentication; replace a reused password with a long, unique passphrase; back-up important files; check your privacy settings; talk with family and friends about scams; and, if you become aware of suspicious activity, report it.

Cybersecurity is a shared responsibility—at home, at work and across our community. Small actions repeated every day, build stronger personal defences as well as workforce behaviours. Similarly, coordinated investment by governments at all levels builds safer and more resilient public services. That is the message for Cyber Security Action Month and it is a message worth carrying throughout the year: Take a second. Stay secure.

I present the following paper:

Cyber Security Action Month—Ministerial statement, 22 October 2026.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Oaks Estate—strategic plan—Assembly resolution of 6 May 2025—government response

Ministerial statement

MS ORR (Yerrabi—Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water, Minister for Disability, Autism and Neurodiversity, Minister for Housing and Homelessness, and Minister for Equality) (10.29): As members will recall, on 6 May 2025 the Assembly passed a resolution calling for the development of a five-year strategic plan to holistically address problems entrenching Oaks Estate in disadvantage.

In response, the ACT government tabled the Oaks Estate Strategic Plan 2025-2030 in October 2025. The plan was developed to respond to the concerns, priorities and aspirations raised during community consultation. The plan sets out 37 actions across key themes of safety, housing, places and spaces, transport, health and education. These actions are designed to be delivered over the short, medium and long term, with the shared objective of improving outcomes for residents and to make Oaks Estate a safer, healthier and more connected place to live.

Importantly, the ACT government committed to reporting annually to the Legislative Assembly on implementation of the plan, to support transparency and accountability. This is the first annual report under the plan. The 2026 progress report outlines progress during the first year of implementation and will be published on the ACT government website. I am pleased to advise the Assembly that implementation is progressing well. Of the 37 actions identified in the plan, 17 actions have been completed; 16 actions are currently ongoing or in progress; and 4 actions are scheduled to commence later in the life of the plan. This represents strong progress in the first year of implementation and demonstrates the ACT government's commitment to delivering on the priorities identified in the plan.

Responding directly to issues raised during the community consultation, residents were provided with information on community safety, responsible dog ownership, available health and mental health services, city services, and updates regarding Robertson House. Roaming and aggressive dogs were identified as an issue during community consultation. In response, Domestic Animal Services compliance officers undertook eight proactive patrols and community engagement activities in Oaks Estate in the first half of 2026. No significant noncompliance issues were identified, and no declared dangerous dogs reside in the suburb. Nonetheless, Access Canberra is working to deliver planned community-based microchipping activities for residents and will continue with further unannounced patrols.

In the 2026-27 budget, the ACT government committed \$2.4 million over four years to continue the community inclusion program, which supports residents with complex needs and helps strengthen community connections and social inclusion. Health and wellbeing supports have also been expanded. The Chat to PAT mobile outreach service has increased from fortnightly to weekly visits, improving vulnerable Canberrans' access to a multidisciplinary team which includes GPs, nurses, counsellors and mental health practitioners.

In addition, the Mental Health Foundation has been commissioned to work with St Vincent de Paul to deliver targeted mental health support to people experiencing mental health concerns in Oaks Estate through the Housing Accommodation Support Initiative.

Social housing tenants and service providers have been provided with information on how to access repairs and maintenance and on how common areas are maintained.

The ACT government has also taken steps to improve transport connectivity. Transport Canberra has developed the Oaks Estate Cross-Border Travel Recognition Policy, which recognises the unique travel arrangements of Oaks Estate residents and enables seamless connections between CDC Canberra and Transport Canberra services for both outbound and return journeys. Transport Canberra is currently drafting a factsheet, including links to journey planning tools and public transport resources, for storage on computers at Vinnies hubs to assist community members in accessing and navigating the public transport network.

To improve other transport options, we also wrote to local taxi and rideshare operators encouraging service provision in Oaks Estate. As a result, we are aware of at least one rideshare company that is currently reviewing its cross-border operating arrangements. The ACT government has also worked with our New South Wales counterparts to ensure cross-border school access arrangements are working.

Mr Speaker, while implementation progress is encouraging, the government acknowledges that plans are ultimately judged not by the number of actions completed but by the difference they make in people's lives. ACT government representatives have met with the Oaks Estate Residents Association to discuss progress, hear feedback and monitor whether implemented initiatives are delivering meaningful outcomes. These discussions and the feedback received reinforce that residents want to see tangible improvements in their everyday experience of living in Oaks Estate, particularly in relation to community safety, service access and neighbourhood amenity.

The government recognises that meaningful and lasting change will require sustained effort over the full life of the plan. And while we have made a start, further work remains to deliver the long-term outcomes sought by the community. The ACT government will publish the 2026 progress report online, notify residents of its publication and encourage ongoing feedback from community members. Continued engagement is critical to ensuring implementation remains responsive to community needs and priorities.

I thank the Oaks Estate community, and the Oaks Estate Residents Association, community organisations, service providers and government officials who have contributed to implementation of the plan and preparation of this report. Their collaboration and commitment are helping to build a safer, stronger and more connected Oaks Estate.

I present the following papers:

Oaks Estate Strategic Plan—

2025-2030—2026 Progress Report, undated.

Assembly resolution of 6 May 2025—Government response—Ministerial statement, 22 October 2026.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the ministerial statement.

MS LEE (Kurrajong) (10.35): I rise to speak on the 2026 progress report on the Oaks Estate Strategic Plan 2025-2030. I thank the minister for the statement and acknowledge her and officials for their work, but the reality is that there is still a long way to go.

The minister states that implementation is “progressing well” and that the government has made “strong progress” in the first year of the plan. Unfortunately, that is not what I am hearing from residents of Oaks Estate. While some actions have been taken, many residents would struggle to describe the progress as “strong”.

I was contacted only last month about continuing dog attacks at Oaks Estate and the utter frustration with the government’s lack of action on this. I have had emails about the lack of action on aging and broken infrastructure and little to no improvement to public spaces. And earlier this year, when the former minister sent residents an update on the strategic plan, I received numerous emails from residents all saying the same thing: “Thanks for the update” but raising concerns about the lack of progress on those practical measures—community safety, playground equipment, footpath and street maintenance, and fencing—and asking where the tangible improvements are that people can actually see and experience in their daily lives.

Following the update, I joined my fellow colleagues and Members for Kurrajong Mr Emerson and Ms Vassarotti to express our concern about the lack of genuine and concrete action on the Oaks Estate Strategic Plan. It is vital that this plan cannot become another report that sits on a shelf while residents continue to wait for real and tangible action.

When we brought this matter before the Assembly in May 2025 by way of a motion that I moved jointly with Mr Emerson and the former Greens Member for Kurrajong Mr Rattenbury, we were clear that this must not be a tick-and-flick exercise. It must deliver real, meaningful and lasting change for a community that has felt overlooked for far too long.

The government must be careful not to fall into the same trap that others have before it—producing strategies, plans and progress reports without delivering the practical and real outcomes residents have been promised. Oaks Estate does not need more paperwork. It needs results.

As I said when moving the original motion, many of the issues being raised are not new. I spoke about how, even as far back as 2015, the late Steve Doszpot moved a motion which raised very similar issues to those that we raised in the motion in May 2025, a whole 10 years later. That was over a decade ago.

Let’s not make the people of Oaks Estate wait another decade. The measure of success will not be how many actions are listed on a progress report or how many can be ticked off on paper. It will be whether the people of Oaks Estate can see safer streets, better infrastructure, improved amenities and a higher quality of life. Let us ensure that this plan delivers genuine change, not just good intentions written on paper. The people of

Oaks Estate deserve nothing less.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (10.38): Thank you to the minister for providing an update on progress under the Oaks Estate Strategic Plan today. This is an important piece of work for my electorate that, as Ms Lee reflected on, came about courtesy of collaboration with my Kurrajong colleagues Ms Lee and, at the time, Mr Rattenbury, and it has now been picked up by Ms Vassarotti as well. And I appreciate that the minister is working to address genuine concerns within a community that has been overlooked and neglected for far too long.

But what are the 17 actions that have been completed, and what does their completion actually mean for the residents of Oaks Estate? The goal of this strategic plan should not be to complete a list of identified actions. The goal should be to make meaningful improvements to living conditions for the Oaks Estate community. Out of the 37 actions, at least nine describe providing information to residents. Identifying each of these as “actions” within a strategic plan gives little consideration to outcomes that tangibly improve quality of life for Oaks Estate residents. Conveying information is not much help if the resources behind that information are stretched thin, unresponsive, and unsuited to the needs of residents.

My office sought feedback from Fiona McGregor, President of the Oaks Estate Residents Association, about this morning’s statement. She had several concerns regarding the minister’s response today. Distributing \$1,600 worth of leaflets and suggesting it completes six actions is disingenuous and ignores the lived reality of residents. She reflected that there are recent examples from just this week of ambulance and police services struggling with jurisdictional responsibilities. She said a designated heritage walk to the river has no handrail and repairs continue to be deferred. Dogs continue to roam the streets and people experience frightening dog attacks. To say that no declared dangerous dogs live in the suburb disregards the many constituents who genuinely feel unsafe leaving their homes because dangerous dogs live in the suburb. The lack of a dangerous dog declaration does not mean much if it does not accord with the lived experience of residents.

The ACT government owns 77 public housing properties in Oaks Estate. According to Fiona, it is substandard housing. Of these 77 properties, she said 37 have not been inspected for at least two years, some for as long as 10 years. Safety concerns continue for residents. The AFP and SafeHome, despite requests from the Residents Association, have not provided the same outreach presence within Oaks Estate. If almost half the strategy has been actioned, and this is the feedback we are getting from the residents association, either these actions have not been completed appropriately or they are not the appropriate actions.

I know that recently a planning firm has also been engaged to prepare a master plan for a new aged care housing facility consisting of approximately 100 independent living units in Oaks Estate. I understand this will require the rezoning of up to five hectares of rural land adjacent to the Molonglo and Queanbeyan rivers. For hundreds of aged care residents to move into this part of Canberra should encourage the minister to consider the actual outcomes desired by the strategic plan; to play an active role in protecting these vulnerable populations from what is continued segregation as experienced by residents; and to ensure any future changes to this community are

pursued collectively in genuine partnership with residents and in a way that actually addresses their concerns.

With all of that said, I am committed to and look forward to continuing to engage with the Oaks Estate residents, the Oaks Estate Residents Association, my Kurrajong colleagues and the minister and her office to better understand the actions in this plan, why this strategic plan is missing the mark for residents—that is the feedback we are all getting—and how the government can move to actually address the needs of the Oaks Estate community.

MS VASSAROTTI (Kurrajong) (10.42): I rise today to also speak to the strategic plan update from the minister, and I thank the minister and officials for the work that they have done today. When I speak about Oaks Estate, I want to speak about something larger than one suburb. I want to speak about community. I want to speak about what it means to look after one another and about our responsibility as a city and a parliament to stand alongside people who are doing it tough.

I want to begin by acknowledging Fiona, the President of the Oaks Estate Residents Association, who others have spoken of, and the residents that continue to advocate for their community. Their advocacy comes from a deep place of love and determination to make life better for their neighbours, and this commitment says a great deal about Oaks Estate.

I want to acknowledge my former colleague, Mr Rattenbury, as well as my fellow members for Kurrajong Ms Lee and Mr Emerson. It is really wonderful when people come together and work together, and the call for the five-year strategic plan for Oaks Estate that resulted from the original motion is proof that great things can happen across the political divide.

I would also like to thank the minister for providing the statement this morning. While the commencement of the strategy is heartening, it is clear that there is much work to be done. I look forward to reading the 2026 progress report in more detail when it is published. The people of Oaks Estate deserve outcomes, and I am proud to push for the outcomes here in this place.

When representatives from this place visit Oaks Estate, as I did on Sunday, one thing becomes very clear: this is a community with enormous strength. It is a community where people know each other, where people look after each other and where people care deeply about the future of their suburb. But it is also a community that continues to feel overlooked.

For many Canberrans it is easy to take certain things for granted. We expect to be able to catch a bus. We expect safe roads and footpaths. We expect to have access to services, community facilities and opportunities to connect with others. These things are not luxuries. They are the foundations of inclusion and participation in community life. But for many people in Oaks Estate, these foundations are missing or difficult to access. Residents continue to speak about deteriorating infrastructure; limited or no public transport, particularly provided by the ACT government; a lack of nearby services; and the challenges that come with isolation. They speak about feeling disconnected from the opportunities that many Canberrans enjoy, and they speak about the cumulative

impact that these challenges have on community wellbeing.

The people of Oaks Estate are not asking for special treatment. They are asking for fairness. They are asking to be seen, to be heard and to be included. We so often talk in this place about building strong communities, and strong communities are not created by accident. They are built through investment, partnership and trust. They are built when governments listen to local knowledge. They are built when residents have a genuine voice in shaping their future. That is why I really support a sustained and collaborative approach to Oaks Estate. I do welcome the government's recognition that meaningful and lasting change will require sustained effort over the full life of the plan, and I do look forward to working with all members in this place for solutions that work for Oaks Estate and all our most vulnerable neighbours.

As others have noted, the work that has occurred over the first 12 months has been somewhat underwhelming. As we recently highlighted, seeing a single letterbox drop cover several information-sharing items in the strategic plan was pretty disappointing. It is still very unclear about the ongoing investment around public housing. We continue to hear from residents who experience challenges with government agencies actually responding to their concerns. As a number of us have noted, there is much, much more work to be done.

The challenges facing this community will not be solved overnight, but some issues do require immediate action. Others will take time, planning and ongoing commitment, but this should not discourage us. In fact, it should strengthen our resolve, and I welcome the opportunity to continue to work with others on this vital issue.

MS ORR (Yerrabi—Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water, Minister for Disability, Autism and Neurodiversity, Minister for Housing and Homelessness, and Minister for Equality) (10.47), in reply: I think it is fair to say, being newer to the portfolio, I have come in part of the way through the rollout of this plan. I will take on board some of the comments that members have made today, and I will check those against the information I have, because there is clearly a difference of views as to what is happening. I would note a lot of members have focused on the information drop and saying that that is all that has occurred in this first year. I do not think that is quite fair, as I noted in my statement—

Mr Emerson: Point of order, Mr Speaker: I am not sure that anyone said that. I think that is a misrepresentation.

MS ORR: I can clarify, if that helps. I am happy to withdraw any comments previously on those 16 actions. Certainly, in listening to the debate today, the focus on the 16 actions and the letter drop, I think it is fair to say that was represented as being the majority of the work that had occurred. I think that that is perhaps not paying enough recognition to the other work that was outlined in my statement, including increasing support through the community sector supports and work that goes on out there, the DAS patrols and other work that has occurred. My point is more that we look at it holistically, not just focus on certain parts.

As I said at the start of my remarks, I will go away and have a look at some of the

comments that are made. If members are finding ongoing concerns where our government is perhaps not aware of those concerns or if they contradict what government is saying, it would be helpful if members raised those with my office because that actually gives us an opportunity to work through those in more detail.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Coroner's report—inquest into the death of MK—report and government response

Ministerial statement

DR PATERSON (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services, and Minister for Gaming Reform) (10.49): I rise today to acknowledge the tragic death of a young person in our community in 2023 and to respond to the recommendations of Coroner Archer's inquest report. The circumstances of this situation are devastating, and I firstly want to offer my heartfelt condolences to this young man's family and friends, who are experiencing the ongoing grief and impact of his loss.

Today I have tabled a report from the Coroner's Court of the ACT on the inquest into the death of MK, which found that a young man drowned in a motor vehicle crash at Lake Tuggeranong in 2023 while impaired by the use of nitrous oxide as an inhalant. In the inquest report His Honour Coroner Archer raises matters of public safety relating to nitrous oxide. He provides three recommendations relating to review of the regulatory framework in the ACT, the capturing of data around harms from nitrous oxide use and the development of educational materials about the risks of harm. Coroner Archer provided a supplementary letter after the report encouraging the government to consider implementing the ACT Drug Strategy Action Plan in response to his findings. The action plan points to nitrous oxide as an emerging issue.

Today I present the government's response to the inquest report, outlining how the government will respond to the three recommendations. Let me be very clear: where nitrous oxide is used recreationally it can cause serious, irrevocable harm, including death. Given this, we must take steps to regulate its sale and supply, particularly to young people, and work on this has already commenced.

Under current law, nitrous oxide is a schedule 6 poison under the commonwealth Standard for the Uniform Scheduling of Medicines and Poisons. It is therefore subject to storage controls to prevent access by children, and packaging must display specific warnings and health information.

Nitrous oxide does have legitimate uses in medicine, dentistry, hospitality, science and industry. Given this, I am advised that nitrous oxide is widely available in retail settings and can currently be purchased online for immediate home delivery, day and night.

However, nitrous oxide can cause significant harm when inhaled for recreational, non-therapeutic purposes. Some people may see nitrous oxide as safe given its accessibility. This is wrong. Nitrous oxide can cause harmful health impacts ranging from dizziness, frostbite, loss of coordination and impaired judgment to psychosis, hypoxia and even death. Repeated inhalation of nitrous oxide depletes vitamin B12, which can cause

neurological damage, difficulty walking and paralysis. Use of nitrous oxide also presents safety hazards because of its effects on coordination, reaction times and risk of losing consciousness, which can create significant danger.

While data is limited, it is widely understood that recreational use of nitrous oxide in Australia is most prevalent amongst young people. Australian reports indicate that clinical harms from nitrous oxide use have been observed in children as young as 10 years old. Most datasets across Australia capture inhalants as a broad category, which is not limited to nitrous oxide. As the ACT has a relatively small population, significant trends are difficult to identify in low population prevalence drug use. In the 2022-23 Australian secondary school students alcohol and drug survey for ACT students aged 12 to 17 years 20 per cent reported inhalant use in their lifetime and seven per cent reported recent use. In the National Drug Household Survey 2022-23 1.8 per cent of surveyed adults reported use of inhalants.

Concerningly, some states and territories have seen a recent increase in harms resulting from recreational use nitrous oxide, particularly in presentations to hospital emergency departments in Victoria. A Victorian hospital has reported an increase in emergency department patients presenting with psychosis-like symptoms from nitrous oxide use. Four deaths were reported to the Victorian coroner in 2025, where nitrous oxide use was found to be a contributing factor. We cannot distinguish nitrous oxide presentations to emergency services from other types of inhalants in the ACT. It is reassuring that data from the New South Wales Poisons Information Centre shows that calls from ACT residents about nitrous oxide harms remain low and have not increased over recent years.

Regardless of relatively low prevalence, this case highlights the urgent need to protect our community from the harms. I agree with Coroner Archer's statement in the inquest report that, "Nitrous oxide use requires a multifaceted response, targeting supply and harm reduction."

Recommendation 1: the ACT government supports the coroner's recommendation to review the regulatory framework for nitrous oxide in the ACT. I have asked the Health and Community Services Directorate to progress regulatory reforms within 12 months to prevent sales to minors and implement restrictions on supply of nitrous oxide in the ACT. These reforms will consider regulatory measures implemented in other jurisdictions and seek to be compatible with new regulations announced for New South Wales while ensuring that any proposed laws are appropriate for our local context.

On 3 July this year the New South Wales government announced the introduction of retail restrictions to reduce harms from recreational use. Commencing on 5 November this year, the New South Wales regulations will ban the sale to minors, limit the size of nitrous oxide containers for retail sale, put restrictions on daily purchase quantities for individuals, prevent same-day and overnight deliveries and prohibit visible displays of nitrous oxide products in retail settings. The regulation will provide exemptions for purchase by legitimate industries. We will work towards consistency with the New South Wales regulatory system, aiming to target recreational use of nitrous oxide, particularly by young people, and not to impact businesses which may have legitimate use.

For recommendation 2, the ACT emergency services does not have systems to capture reliable data for incidents related to nitrous oxide. Anecdotally, there is no notable increase in emergency presentations relating to nitrous oxide. Establishment of functionality within the existing system to separately capture data on nitrous oxide use would involve significant cost, which would exceed the benefits that could be delivered. This is particularly true with reference to the ACT's small population and low prevalence. The ACT government will therefore not establish a dataset for nitrous oxide harms, as recommended by the coroner. However, the Health and Community Services Directorate will continue to observe data and anecdotal evidence locally and from other jurisdictions to maintain awareness of nitrous oxide trends across the country.

For recommendation 3, public awareness of the potential harms of nitrous oxide is an important part of reducing demand for nitrous oxide in the ACT and reducing the harm for those who use it. The Health and Community Services Directorate will work with key stakeholders and government counterparts to ensure the ACT community can access current and relevant information on nitrous oxide and its harms. As an initial step, the government has published a webpage with information regarding nitrous oxide harms, available supports and links to trusted sources of information. As regulatory reforms progress over the next 12 months, we will work to ensure additional targeted educational materials are prepared, as required, to support community education and awareness about the harms associated.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the workers within the alcohol and other drug sector in the ACT that strive to support people in our community who are impacted by alcohol and other drug use, including inhalants such as nitrous oxide. I commend their dedication to minimise harm to Canberrans.

I thank His Honour Coroner Archer, for his investigations and report into the tragic incident that led to the death of MK. The government acknowledges the findings of the inquest, and I will ensure the Health and Community Services Directorate follows through with the actions outlined in the government response to the recommendations. Finally, I would just like to reiterate my condolences to MK's family.

I present the following papers:

Coroners Act, pursuant to section 57—Report of Coroner—Inquest into the death of MK—

Report, dated 8 April 2026.

Government response, undated.

Government response—Ministerial statement, 22 October 2026.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the ministerial statement.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Housing—government housing programs—order to table documents

MS VASSAROTTI (Kurrajong) (10.59): Together with Mr Emerson, I move:

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

- (1) table the following documents from the Eleventh Assembly:
 - (a) all briefs to ministers regarding the Growing and Renewing Public Housing Program;
 - (b) all briefs to ministers regarding the Commonwealth Social Housing Accelerator Program and the Housing Australia Future Fund;
 - (c) all briefs to ministers regarding the program of work for repairs and maintenance of public housing properties;
 - (d) all briefs to ministers or to senior executives regarding actual and planned expenditure on public housing repairs and maintenance;
 - (e) all reports from Programmed Facility Management to Housing ACT regarding repairs and maintenance for the 2025-2026 and 2026-2027 financial years;
 - (f) all briefs to ministers and progress reports regarding Housing ACT's insourcing trials and work towards insourcing repairs and maintenance work;
 - (g) all briefs to ministers regarding Housing ACT's Total Facilities Management Agreement;
 - (h) all briefs to ministers regarding the Public Housing Pipeline Program;
 - (i) all briefs to ministers regarding public housing vacancy rates, vacant property turnaround times and turnaround times for repairs and maintenance;
 - (j) all documents outlining key performance indicators for repairs and maintenance of public housing properties;
 - (k) all briefs to ministers regarding the Multi-Disciplinary Panel;
 - (l) all briefs to ministers regarding the public housing waitlist, including any policy work on the development of a new internal process to replace the Multi-Disciplinary Panel;
 - (m) all briefs to ministers regarding Specialist Disability Accommodation;
 - (n) all briefs to ministers and any correspondence from the Minister, the Minister's office, or government officials, regarding the "20 Homes by Christmas" initiative; and
 - (o) for the period 1 April to 30 June 2026, for all Housing ACT properties in the suburbs of Ainslie, Coombs, Fraser and Narrabundah, work orders provided by Programmed Facility Management to Housing ACT for repairs and maintenance work to these properties; and
- (2) by every 1 February and 1 August until the end of the Eleventh Assembly, table aggregated summaries of the following data for the previous six months, aligned to financial years:
 - (a) monthly tenants housed, transferred and exited, and the total public housing trend;
 - (b) monthly number of acquisitions and disposals of public housing stock,

broken down by property type, such as one-bedroom, two-bedroom, apartment and standalone dwelling, and suburb;

- (c) monthly turnaround times for maintenance and repairs, including information regarding performance against key performance indicators stipulated in Housing ACT's service agreement with Programmed Facility Management;
- (d) current number of vacant public housing properties, by vacancy type;
- (e) the average, median, minimum and maximum number of days left vacant for these properties;
- (f) the average, median, minimum and maximum number of days left vacant for properties requiring repairs and maintenance in each category:
 - (i) routine;
 - (ii) single upgrade;
 - (iii) multiple upgrades;
 - (iv) major works; and
 - (v) insurance;
- (g) information regarding properties that have been deemed "hard to let" including suburb, condition, number of offers provided and days left vacant for these properties; and
- (h) how many "hard to let" properties are currently:
 - (i) vacant; and
 - (ii) tenanted.

I rise today to speak to the motion but also note that there is an amendment that Mr Emerson has also circulated, so I will be speaking to that as well. I would like to thank Mr Emerson and his office for their collaboration on this matter, and I would also like to thank Minister Orr and her office for their consideration as we have been discussing this motion. There has been lots of really productive discussion regarding this.

Public housing matters. It matters because a safe, secure and affordable home is the foundation for a good life. It is where people raise families, recover from hardships, maintain connections and build a life, build a future. That is why it is so important that we continue to grow Canberra's public housing stock. It is also why it is essential that we properly maintain the homes that we already have. This motion is straightforward. It seeks information about two fundamental responsibilities of government: how we are acquiring and delivering additional public housing developments and how we are maintaining the public housing stock that we currently own.

Over recent years the Assembly has received a range of updates about public housing programs, repairs and maintenance activities, vacancy turnaround times and investment in housing. These updates paint a picture of progress, yet many of us continue to hear a different story for tenants, community organisations and advocates working directly with people in the system. We hear stories of repairs taking too long. We hear concerns about vacant properties remaining empty while housing waiting lists grow. We hear frustrations about communication and accountability. We hear questions about whether

programs designed to expand public housing are delivering as intended.

This motion is about getting to the bottom of these questions. It is about ensuring that the Assembly has the information needed to properly scrutinise government activity and assess whether outcomes on the ground match the outcomes that are reported. The order seeks a range of documents from the 11th Assembly. These include ministerial briefs related to key public housing programs, such as the Growth and Renewing Public Housing Program, the Housing Australia Future Fund, the Social Housing Accelerator initiatives, the Public Housing Pipeline Program and the program of repairs and maintenance across public housing properties.

It also seeks information concerning ACT's facility management arrangements, the progress of the insourcing, repair and maintenance work, reports from programs facilities management, vacancy rates, turnaround times for vacant properties and public housing waitlist information. Importantly, this motion seeks information about the expenditure on repairs and maintenance, key performance indicators and the reporting against these indicators. If we are investing substantial public funds in maintaining public housing, the Assembly should be able to understand how this investment is translating into outcomes for tenants. The motion also requests more detailed information about maintenance work orders across a sample of properties in several suburbs. That information may help us better understand how requests move through the system and where the lived experience of tenants aligns with the reported performance measures.

The Greens have long argued that housing cannot be left solely to the private market. For too long, governments across Australia have stepped back from direct intervention in housing, assuming the market would provide the homes we need. The result has been a housing crisis that is affecting people across the income spectrum but which hits low-income Canberrans particularly hard. When housing is treated primarily as an investment asset rather than a basic necessity, too many people are locked out of secure and affordable homes, and that is why public housing remains so important. It provides homes that are not subject to the same market pressures and enables government to play a direct role in meeting community need.

Government intervention in housing is not just about building new homes; it is also about being a good landlord. It is about maintaining homes to a proper standard, and it is about responding to repairs promptly. It is about making sure housing tenants live in homes that are safe, dignified and well maintained. This motion seeks information that will help the Assembly assess how effectively these responsibilities are being carried out. Transparency strengthens public confidence, supports accountability and ultimately helps to deliver better outcomes for tenants.

I also understand that there will be some government amendments, and we will support the government amendments on this motion. I thank Minister Orr and her office for their engagement on this. Once again, I would particularly like to thank Mr Emerson and his office for the really productive collaborative work on this motion and commend it to the Assembly.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (11.05): I will be speaking as a co-sponsor of this motion and first of all, due to that, I would like to thank and commend Ms Vassarotti and her

team for how they have collaborated both practically and generously with me and my office on this motion. I think we have even learnt a lot along the way and I am really pleased with where we have landed.

At the core of what we are often trying to do as crossbenchers, and should be, is to scrutinise government decision-making, provide accountability for our communities, increase transparency around issues of public interest and push for positive change. When it comes to public housing, the issue at the core of this motion, we know we need to do more and do better in this place to help the Canberrans in our community who are most in need of our help. That cohort of people is growing.

As has been brought up many times in this Assembly, and will continue to be, our housing system is in a state of crisis. High interest rates, cost-of-living pressures, growing construction costs, a broken housing market, rising rents and a persistent shortfall of new homes have led to decreasing rates of safe, secure housing and increasing housing affordability issues across the ACT. Young people, low-income earners, women escaping family and domestic violence, single-parent households and people living on income support payments are all experiencing alarming rates of housing stress, and more and more people are falling into housing poverty. More and more people require support from a housing system that too often is failing them.

The public housing waitlist stands currently at 3,652 approved applicants. These are people we know cannot afford to access the private housing market. Since 2024, the waitlist has increased by over 600 households. Social housing has been chronically underfunded in the ACT for decades and the proportion of our total housing stock comprising public housing has decreased significantly and continues to decrease. The stock we do have is in the second poorest condition in the country, with just 71 per cent of dwellings deemed to be of an acceptable standard, a decrease from 76 per cent in 2023 and 81 per cent in 2016. That means, and I will repeat it, almost a third of public housing tenants in our community are living in homes that do not have at least four working facilities, like a stove and a shower, and no more than two major structural defects.

We have 588 public housing properties sitting vacant, a number which is also increasing, while the average wait time for priority public housing is more than five months and for standard public housing, five years. Five years. Imagine being in a position where you need help from the government to give you a roof over your head, and you are told you qualify, “We agree you need help, but it will be five years before you get it.”

Many of the programs and policies named in this motion, though clearly well intended, are just not working, or they are not working well enough. They are not working for the people who need them to work. They are not working for the government either. They are not meeting this challenge, which is an enormous challenge. In the first half of 2026, our public housing waitlist grew by more than 150 households while the number of vacant public housing properties also grew to almost 600.

Canberrans see the empty homes in their suburbs and are rightly asking why so many government-owned properties sit vacant when they also see members of our community sleeping rough or raising kids in their cars. Something is fundamentally broken here.

Because of that, we need greater transparency about what is and is not happening. We need to look under the hood and see what is going on, which is what this motion is about.

This motion also touches on so-called hard-to-let or low-demand properties. Hard-to-let properties, from how I understand it, are properties that, due to various reasons, such as conditions, surroundings and location, are difficult to let over a prolonged period of time. From what we have heard from constituents in complexes that have been labelled hard to let, that label carries with it a weight and stigma that continues and intensifies the issues around it.

It is clear that the fact that this category exists, or is used in some forums, is completely unacceptable. We need to understand why these properties are hard to let and what the longer-term plan for them is. With the level of demand we are seeing for safe, secure, affordable housing, it is not okay that some of our government-owned homes are in such poor condition, putting tenants in such inappropriate circumstances that they cannot be tenanted, while 3,652 households wait for a home.

When debating issues like public housing, issues that sit at the core of our welfare and social support systems, it is imperative that we hear from people with lived experience, people with boots on the ground. That is why I would like to take this opportunity to read a statement from someone who quite literally has boots on the ground, a resident of Condamine Court, which is a low-demand public housing complex that has many hard-to-let properties, and has endured the difficulties that come with that label. These are the words of Gus Bamberry, a tenant in one of Canberra's high-density public housing complexes.

Almost 10 years ago I got a call after many years on the public housing waitlist. I was offered a place at Condamine Court in Turner, and I could not believe my luck. Finally, a place of my own that was affordable in such a great location. For a person on the disability support pension, at first, it felt like I had struck gold. Now, almost 10 years later, the hair stands up on the back of my neck and I start to panic a little when someone knocks on my door loudly. The things I have experienced over my time in public housing, which will stay with me for a lifetime, should not have come at the cost of an affordable roof over my head.

I often refer to my home, Condamine Court, as a dumping ground for the ACT government. I use this term not to describe the people who live at Condamine Court and the other hard-to-let complexes in the ACT, but for how they are treated by the ACT government. The community here are good people. Hard-to-let complexes are used to house some of our most marginalised and vulnerable neighbours, out of sight and out of mind for the rest of Canberra. If you find yourself experiencing homelessness, coming out of jail or escaping domestic violence, then you might just be offered a hard-to-let property due to their high vacancy rates.

These members of the community are housed here with little support, or support which is not conducive to the environment of a hard-to-let complex. Even the basics of daily life become more difficult when living in a hard to let. The same circumstances of a broken allocation system resulting in unsustainable tenancies are an endless cycle. They move in, the support falls away and it is replaced by further disadvantage, making it harder to find one's footing. The tenancy is lost,

the cycle repeats. But it is better than being on the streets, right?

A former neighbour of mine moved into Condamine a few years ago, after experiencing homelessness while living with an abusive ex-partner in a tent. She took the first thing she was offered, a hard to let. A few months into her tenancy, I remember her asking me a question with tears in her eyes that stayed with me. “Gus, how is this worse? How is this worse than being homeless? I have got a roof over my head. How is this worse?” Please take a moment of your time to consider that question yourself. How is it that a person with a roof over their head, living in affordable housing on Northbourne Avenue, could feel as if they were better off homeless?

I learned the importance of looking after your community, even those with vastly different backgrounds and experiences, because if we do not, who will? The hard-to-let complexes are a hidden shame of the local government, where we dump some of our most marginalised people, some with complex needs. There are clear solutions to lifting the hard-to-let label and never using it again. In my years of tenancy or advocacy, I have not seen any credible long-term work towards this goal.

Hard to let is a death knell upon a public housing complex. It is a symbol that the government has genuinely failed people in our community. The support these communities need from their government starts with improving their quality of lives at home. I often tell people, “I have survived 10 years at Condamine”, but it should be “I have lived at Condamine for 10 years,” which is telling of life in a hard-to-let. A hard-to-let complex is a failed one. It is time to do better.

Gus and others like Gus must sit at the heart of what we do here. Getting this right is hard. I acknowledge that. But for all the Canberrans in need of a roof over their heads, people like Gus, we have to try harder and work together to do better. How that starts is by understanding what is going wrong. That is what this motion is about.

I would like to thank Minister Orr and everyone in the Orr office for their engagement on this, as well as my co-sponsor, Ms Vassarotti, and her office, for their collaboration on this throughout the week. There was a fair bit of work to get through. So I am glad we gave ourselves until Thursday to figure out an agreed final version of this motion, which is my understanding of what has occurred. I will be moving the amendment, which is a little bit of a rewrite that we have agreed on. We have spoken with the minister’s office and due to word count they will have to move that little part separately. I am very supportive of the minister’s amendment and I would have been happy to include it as my own. With all of that said:

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

Leave granted.

MR EMERSON: I move:

Omit all text after “orders the Government to:”, substitute:

“(1) table the following documents from the Eleventh Assembly within 60 days:

(a) all briefs to ministers regarding:

- (i) the Growing and Renewing Public Housing Program;
 - (ii) the Commonwealth Social Housing Accelerator Program and the Housing Australia Future Fund;
 - (iii) the Public Housing Pipeline Program;
 - (iv) the program of work for repairs and maintenance of public housing properties;
 - (v) the ACT's Total Facilities Management Agreement;
 - (vi) the Multi-Disciplinary Panel;
 - (vii) Specialist Disability Accommodation;
 - (viii) public housing vacancy rates, vacant property turnaround times and the public housing waitlist; and
 - (ix) low-demand public housing complexes;
- (b) all briefs to ministers and progress reports for the insourcing repairs and maintenance work, including insourcing trials;
 - (c) all briefs to ministers or to senior executives regarding actual and planned expenditure on public housing repairs and maintenance;
 - (d) a list of key performance indicators for repairs and maintenance under the Total Facilities Management Agreement;
 - (e) all reports from Programmed Facility Management (PFM) regarding repairs and maintenance for the 2025-2026 and 2026-2027 financial years;
 - (f) all briefs to ministers and ministerial correspondence regarding the ACT's historic housing debt to the Commonwealth; and
 - (g) all briefs to ministers and any correspondence from minister, officials and the Minister's office regarding the '20 Homes by Christmas' initiative; and
 - (h) for the period 1 April to 30 June 2026, for all Housing ACT properties in the suburbs of Ainslie, Coombs, Fraser and Narrabundah, de-identified information on work orders provided by PFM to the ACT Government for repairs and maintenance work to properties with redacted addresses;
- (2) for the remainder of the 11th Assembly table, within 60 days of the period 1 January to 30 June and the period 1 July and 31 December each year, aggregated summaries relating to ACT public housing for the following:
 - (a) the total number of tenancies ceased;
 - (b) the total number of tenancies commenced;
 - (c) the number of tenancies commenced by tenants on the transfer list;
 - (d) the number of tenancies commenced by applicants on the waiting list;
 - (e) the total number of properties added to or removed from the public housing portfolio, including a breakdown by property type and method of additional or disposal;
 - (f) the number of vacant properties that have been available for allocation for more than 180 days, including a breakdown by property type;
 - (g) vacancy rates and the latest condition reports for each low-demand complex;

- (h) the total number of vacant properties;
- (i) the number of vacant properties undergoing:
 - (i) routine maintenance;
 - (ii) single upgrade;
 - (iii) multiple upgrades;
 - (iv) major works; and
 - (v) insurance claim; and
- (j) monthly turnaround times for vacant properties handed to PFM for maintenance and repairs, including information regarding performance against PFM's key performance indicators;
- (3) for paragraphs (2)(a) to (2)(h), provide information at district level; and
- (4) for paragraphs (2)(h) to (2)(i), provide average, median, minimum and maximum days of vacancy for each category."

MS BARRY (Ginninderra) (11.16): The opposition will be supporting this motion today and all of the amendments that accompany it. At the core of this motion, it seeks to pull back the curtain on Labor's year-on-year mismanagement of ACT public housing. If I did not know better, I would have thought that my speechwriter sat down with Ms Vassarotti and Mr Emerson and wrote this speech because we are essentially saying the same thing. That is because the problem has been raised with all of us in this place so many times that sometimes it feels like we are beginning to sound like a broken record. It feels like you just keep talking but nothing happens. You just keep talking about the same issues, year-on-year—I have been here for 24 months—and it is the same issues. And it seems to be getting worse. It seems that we are going backwards. The stats show we are going backwards.

We now have public housing properties where the minimum standard—some of them are not even meeting the minimum standards. You have people living in mould, you have people living in—just squalor. It is a disgrace that, as the capital city, that is what human beings, human beings, live in. It is a disgrace.

Mr Assistant Speaker, it also seems that it does not matter what we say, how many letters we send, the government is not feeling the pressure, or maybe they do not care. It is as plain as day that they are comfortable operating within their complacency. Comfortable with year-on-year waiting lists. Comfortable with the horrendous conditions that so many tenants are living in. We get emails on emails. We are writing letters. We are spending time for something as basic as the minimum standard for a liveable home. The government expects private landlords to have a minimum standard and to stick to it, but they have not held themselves to the same standard. But we expect that they should hold themselves to more, because they are the government. They should be the ideal landlord. But they are not.

The beauty of this motion is that, the essence of it, calls the government's bluff. The government has been telling us for years that they could not be managing our public systems better, they could not be getting applicants into properties faster and they could not be fixing essential maintenance items more efficiently. What do we say to that, Mr Assistant Speaker? Well, this is an opportunity to tell us if you are. After resting on

their laurels for years, the crossbench are demanding that they show us the briefings they have received on the state of public housing, show us the maintenance reports, show us the true state of public housing vacancy rates, and we will decide how much truth there is in this government's claim that they could not be doing any better.

In Canberra, if you cannot afford the private rental market and need to rely on public housing, under this government, you are waiting on average 1,875 days if you are a standard applicant. I will say it again, 1,875 days. That is over five years. So if you cannot afford a private rental right now, in 2026, and you apply for public housing today, you might get a phone call inviting you to inspect a property sometime in October 2031.

When I asked during budget estimates if that was acceptable, I think I just got a snide remark, "We are doing our best. We are doing what we can." This is a progressive government, or a so-called progressive government. They have been in place for 25 years so they had all of the levers to pull to manage this appalling situation. But for whatever reason, they have not pulled those levers.

If you finally make it into a public housing property, to then realise that your neighbours are violent, or your bathroom is covered in black mould, or your roof has literally caved in—I had a woman write to me and say her roof had caved in. There were possums in the roof. Her roof caved in and she has been waiting three months. Three months. But then, again, if you do not finally get them to repair your caved-in roof, and you apply for a transfer to another property for whatever reason—you want to downgrade, downsize, you want a bigger property because you have children—you are waiting 1,586 days for a standard transfer, another four years.

I have been working with a constituent who has been asking for a mutual swap, so for her to swap her property with someone else. I understand that there are complexities around that. Person A has said, "I want your house." Person B has said, "I like it, let's swap." They have been trying to get a mutual swap for two and a half years. Two and a half years for a mutual swap.

Mr Assistant Speaker, the issues with our public housing system are pervasive. Conditions for very vulnerable housing tenants will only stand a chance of being improved if we rip the corporate veil, if we pull back the curtains and see what is actually going on, and that is precisely what this motion does. I commend the minister for not trying to strip it down or water it down. I think she has come to this in good faith. I do agree, just on the amendment, that 30 days was a bit too short for the sort of information that was required. So we accept that 60 days is quite reasonable. I also agree that—well, I initially opposed the government's amendments around the 60 day, 90-day reporting back period, but I understand that Ms Vassarotti and Mr Emerson are in agreement with the government, so we accept that reporting period as well.

In closing, this motion is a litmus test, as this government's complacency just cannot go unchecked. What the opposition and crossbench are calling for is that just about every possible report, every ministerial brief, every data point tells you that the system is broken and Canberrans are fed up. No government should be in power for 25 years. It is a recipe for complacency. It is a recipe for arrogance and it is a recipe for neglect. I commend this motion to the Assembly and I thank Ms Vassarotti and Mr Emerson for

bringing it forward.

Mr Emerson's amendment agreed to.

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: The question is that the motion, as amended, be agreed.

MS ORR (Yerrabi—Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water, Minister for Disability, Autism and Neurodiversity, Minister for Housing and Homelessness, and Minister for Equality) (11.24): I would like to start by acknowledging, as others have, the collegiate and respectful nature that working through the amendments to this motion have taken and it has been helpful. Coming into the portfolio in August, I always knew this was a big and complex portfolio. Now I am even more knowledgeable as to how big and complex it is, and I appreciate there is a lot there. In the original wording of the motion put forward by Mr Emerson and Ms Vassarotti there were some considerations of scope that I appreciate them helping to work through, what it was more clearly that they were seeking, so that things that were not within their interest could be excluded just to make the task a little bit more manageable.

With that in mind, I do have the amendment that I have circulated in my name that I would like to move. It adds in a few areas for recognising the personal and sensitive nature of a quite significant amount of the information that is held in this portfolio, particularly around the location of public housing and individuals' personal circumstances and just making it clear that it will be redacted and is not required, and also an exclusion of documents that are not actually needed because they do not go to the intent of what the movers were looking for. So that certainly helps in what will be a very big task in pulling this together.

I would also note on the reporting, while the government will work through what is requested for the ongoing six month reports to be tabled, this will require us to generate information that we do not currently necessarily have to report in that particular way or reporting lines that we are still working up and—I should put the disclaimer in just for everyone's awareness—that does mean that there will be a level of uncertainty in the validation and ongoing reporting of those areas. We will continue to develop that reporting and just ask that people bear with us as we do it. That is probably all I have to say on the reporting.

I am not going to go too much into the comments that have been made through the speeches but I would just like to clarify the hard to lets. I know this is a big feature of Mr Emerson's remarks. I think there are not complexes or apartments that are deemed hard to let. Hard to let is a reference given to a property that has been offered many times and turned down by tenants. So I would like to put that on the record, just for clarification.

I would also just like to iterate against some of the comments that have been put here around the government not necessarily caring. I do not actually think that is the case. It is certainly not my position and it is not a sentiment that I have experienced with my colleagues either. I dare say we will be having lots more discussions and debates on public housing so I will not provide any more remarks now, but again I acknowledge the work that everyone has put into making this motion as practicable in its scope as

possible.

I move:

After all text in paragraph (1), insert new paragraph:

“(2) for the items covered in paragraph (1), the following applies:

- (a) all information identifying the location of public housing properties or individuals or individuals’ personal circumstances is to be redacted; and
- (b) meeting briefs, arrangement briefs, question time briefs, responses to questions on notice and questions taken on notice, and correspondence or replies to correspondence that have not been specifically requested are excluded;”

Ms Orr’s amendment agreed to.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: The question now is that the motion, as amended be agreed to.

MS VASSAROTTI (Kurrajong) (11.29): I will make a few comments, in closing the debate. I want to thank everyone across the chamber for the productive and collaborative way in which we have come together on this motion. I think that it will provide significant assistance to the Assembly in its scrutiny role.

I want to pick up on a couple of the minister’s comments. Some of the work that we have done around the issue of “hard to let” has been an interesting element of the discussions that we have had across offices. In the discussion about “hard to let”, it is something that is referred to quite often, and it has been interesting to delve into the fact that we do not have a category here. In looking at areas of low demand, particularly in the estates, and what we can do to improve those complexes, it is something that we want to work on, across the Assembly, in relation to improving that area.

I also want to pick up on the minister’s comment regarding commentary about the government not caring. I do not think anyone thinks that the government does not care. The issue is around the need to translate that into real action. What is very clear is that the community care a great deal. I am thinking particularly about the issue of the level of vacancy rates, particularly when we see the level of homelessness, and particularly visible homelessness across the community. It is a comment and an issue that all community members raise, with great distress. I think this is an issue that people care very deeply about.

As I said, I thank everyone across the Assembly. We look forward to getting the information and continuing to contribute constructively on this important issue.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Order of business

Ordered that order of the day No 2, Assembly business, relating to the proposed amendment to standing order 74, be postponed until the next day of sitting.

Standing orders—suspension

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

That so much of the standing orders be suspended as would prevent notice No 3, Assembly business, being called on and debated forthwith.

Gambling and Racing Control (Code of Practice) Amendment Regulation 2026 (No 1)—Subordinate Law SL2026-15—proposed amendment

MS VASSAROTTI (Kurrajong) (11.32): I move:

That, in accordance with section 68 of the *Legislation Act 2001*, Subordinate Law SL2026-15, being the *Gambling and Racing Control (Code of Practice) Amendment Regulation 2026 (No 1)*, be amended as follows:

- (1) in section 2, omit “1 July 2027” and substitute “1 March 2027”; and
- (2) omit section 4 and substitute:

“substitute

1.27B Operating times of gaming machines

A licensee must not operate a gaming machine between 2 am and 10 am.”.

This motion is to amend the Gambling and Racing Control (Code of Practice) Amendment Regulation 2026 (No 1), which the minister tabled on Tuesday. This is an important motion because it is about the health and wellbeing of the Canberra community. It is about the responsibility to reduce gambling harm, which is a pernicious force that is ruining people’s lives. To try and put this into some perspective, according to a report from Charles Livingstone and FARE, the level of harm associated with gambling in the ACT is on a similar level to that of a major mental illness.

On that note, I will say that I expect that the Liberal Party will not support this motion. However, I do think that Mr Parton, or whoever speaks, needs to explicitly address this question of harm. What about the ruined lives from the machines that are deliberately designed to be addictive, and the impact on issues such as male suicide rates?

If it makes more sense to put this in economic terms, another finding in the Charles Livingstone report is that the community contributions made by clubs in the ACT do not outweigh the harm that is being caused by gambling harm. To translate this finding, it means that, basically, yes, clubs make great contributions to the community, but this does not offset the serious harm being caused by their pokies.

Another reason that this motion is important is because it holds the government to account. It simply asks the government to fulfil a public commitment that it made two years ago. That is what my motion asks for. It asks the government to take a reasonable harm reduction measure. It asks it simply to keep its word.

The regulation tabled by the minister extends the mandatory shutdown period of poker machines. A pokies shutdown period is an effective harm reduction measure, particularly when poker machines are shut down at night, when the worst harm occurs. It creates a break in play. We are already coming from a low base in the ACT. The ACT currently has one of the shortest pokies shutdown periods in Australia. Currently, poker machines in the ACT are only required to shut down between 4 am and 9 am daily.

The problem with the regulation tabled by the minister is that it does not extend the shutdown period by long enough. It allows pokies to keep operating at the most harmful times, into the early hours of the morning. Longer operating hours, particularly late at night, particularly on weekends, mean more harm in the community. We can look at the evidence to back this up. It is cited in the government's own regulatory impact statement. This shows that, when it comes to pokies' operating hours, gambling harm concentration increases substantially after 2 am.

The 2023 New South Wales Responsible Gambling Fund study, for example, found that problem gambling risk increased substantially the later that the gambling occurred, with the highest risk observed amongst those gambling into the early mornings. The risk of harm rises the later the gambling occurs. Let me quote from a media release of Liquor and Gaming New South Wales, which funded the study, as the results are pretty clear:

The 'Impact of Electronic Gaming Machine (EGM) Late Night Play on EGM Player Behaviours' study found that people with gambling problems represent the majority of late-night poker machine players, with almost two thirds of people playing poker machines between 2am and 8am experiencing significant negative consequences."

Unfortunately, that is the exact period of time that the government is reintroducing into the ACT operating hours by renegeing on its original commitment. The government's regulation will allow gambling until 4 am on some nights. It facilitates high-risk late-night play and consequential harm.

I note as well that it is the policy of gambling harm advocates to reduce operating hours. Groups such as Anglicare and the national Alliance for Gambling Reform call for a shutdown that starts at 2 am at the latest. The Canberra Gambling Reform Alliance's position is 1 am. The government's tabled regulation is out of step with the evidence, and out of step with the position of harm reduction advocates.

I expect the government to say that it is reducing operating hours by some amount; it is better than it was, so that is good enough. Frankly, it is not good enough. Sometimes the government sounds like a mechanic that you ask to fix four flat tyres on your car. When they only fix one of the tyres, they indignantly say, "Why are you complaining? It's better than it was."

Let us turn to the second element of this motion; that is, the fact that the regulation does represent a broken commitment from the government. It proposes to implement a shutdown period that is shorter than what was originally promised by government. It is shorter than the commitment made publicly by the Chief Minister. Naturally, this is very concerning. It is also somewhat mystifying. It is mystifying to the Greens, and it is also mystifying to the gambling harm reduction advocates who expected the

government to follow through on its promise.

The public commitment made by government—in fact, in an announcement made by the Chief Minister—very clearly was that the pokie shutdown period would be between “2 am and 10 am each day”. Instead, the minister has tabled a regulation that has a shutdown period of 2 am to 9 am on Fridays—shorter than what was promised—and 4 am to 9 am on Saturdays—also shorter than what was promised, and no better than the existing Saturday shutdown period, so there are no proposed changes for Saturdays at all—and 4 am to 10 am on Sundays, which is also shorter than what was promised. The difference between the tabled regulation and the original promise is an additional six hours a week when pokies will remain in operation late at night.

Why did the government water down their original commitment to shut off pokies between 2 am and 10 am each day? Why didn’t they just implement the original commitment? A natural assumption is that the minister and government must have been lobbied by poker machine operators to water down the commitment. When it comes to poker machines, the community’s losses are the operators’ gains, and we know there is a long and compromising historical entanglement between the Labor Party and pokies.

I asked the minister in question time if licensed gambling venues or their representatives lobbied her or other ministers to water down the original commitment. She answered that there had been no lobbying. Apparently, clubs or their representatives had never, in any correspondence or discussions, said to any ministers that they did not support the proposed reduction in poker machine operating hours.

That leaves us with another question: why did the government wind back its original commitment to implement blanket shutdown periods from 2 am to 10 am when, apparently, gaming machine operators did not even ask for it to be wound back? Why would they reduce this effective harm reduction measure? When I asked the minister, her answer was:

Ultimately, this is around supporting the night-time economy. We know that people like to go out on Friday and Saturday nights and, with the implementation of the reduced operating hours on the other nights of the week, that seemed a reasonable measure.

The reason for the watered-down harm reduction measures is to support the night-time economy. As the minister notes, people go out to play pokies in the early hours of the morning on Friday and Saturday nights. But, as I quoted earlier, two-thirds of people playing poker machines between 2 am and 8 am are experiencing significant negative consequences. That is not a healthy night-time economy. And there has been much discussion about the impact of pokies on other elements of the night-time economy, such as live music.

I really appreciate that the minister was honest about what the government has done here. It has decided to trade away a reduction in community harm in exchange for purported night-time economic measures. But this does not accord with the principle asserted by the government of putting the community first and protecting the community from harm.

The Greens position is that this is a bad trade-off. This is a decision of principle, and the government is making the wrong decision. We all know about the serious and extensive harm caused in the community by poker machines. We say that reducing the harm that is concentrated in these late-night hours is the priority. I point out again that, according to the minister, the industry did not even request that the government wind back its original commitment to the poker machines shutdown period.

I will add that I met with ClubsACT recently and asked them about this issue. It turns out that their main concern is really about having consistency with New South Wales operating hours. The government's proposal will not even achieve that. I also learnt from that meeting that New South Wales is likely to transition towards a more blanket requirement for 2 am shutdowns. The Independent Liquor and Gaming Authority has said that it is unlikely to approve applications for gaming hours beyond 2 am because of the high risks. I also note that Tasmania has just implemented a requirement for poker machines to shut down from 2 am each day. The ACT government, despite its purported leadership, is lagging behind.

The actual amendment that I am proposing is really simple. It reinstates the government's original commitment, as announced by the Chief Minister, to require poker machines to shut down between 2 am and 10 am each day. This would be a good outcome that would reduce harm during the most concentrated and risky hours. We could, of course, consider an even longer shutdown period. Closing down poker machines from 1 am would make a further improvement. But in the interests of getting an agreement, and in the interests of putting forward something that the government should be able to support, we will simply ask for the original promise to be honoured. Surely, we can agree on that. In 2024, the government did agree to this proposal, so why can't they agree to it now? The government and the minister say that they are committed to addressing gambling harm and that we have a responsibility to reduce this harm. Here is a really simple way to do it.

I will respond to an excuse that I heard the minister give in question time. She said that the commitment was made by a previous government. Just to be clear, I think that is a spurious argument. The commitment to 2 am to 10 am shutdown periods was made publicly in September 2024, and it was made by the Chief Minister. Should we not listen to any commitments that were made before the October election? If there was no intention to keep that commitment, why was it announced? Was it a deliberate deception that was immediately discarded? It feels a bit like Tony Abbott's infamous comments about not every commitment being ironclad, and some commitments not being the gospel truth.

The second part of the amendment amends the start date of the new operating hours from 1 July 2027 to 1 March 2027. I think this is perfectly reasonable, given the changes were first announced over two years ago, and they should have been implemented two years ago. We need to get moving on this. Waiting until July 2027 means there will have been a wait of more than 2½ years to see any reduction in operating hours.

In conclusion, I note that the amount of losses in the ACT community from poker machines—which is also an indication of the amount of harm that is occurring—has reached record levels. More money is going into poker machines than ever. There has been no reduction in harm through the term of this Assembly. There is a difference

between rhetoric on harm reduction and taking actual, evidence-based action. Here we have a simple and evidence-based measure that the government is, for some reason, not taking. Let us get past that and make a change that will reduce harm and benefit the Canberra community. 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) (11.47): I would like to thank Ms Vassarotti for bringing this matter to the Assembly today, but the government will be opposing Ms Vassarotti's motion.

Currently, in the ACT, a gaming machine licensee must not operate a machine between 4 am and 9 am. ACT Labor is changing that. On 15 September, I signed the regulation to increase the time during which poker machines must shut down in the territory. The revised shutdown periods will be 2 am to 10 am Monday to Thursday, 2 am to 9 am Friday, 4 am to 9 am Saturday and 4 am to 10 am Sunday. The revised EGM shutdown period will be an additional 15 hours of mandated shutdown. I refute Ms Vassarotti's comments that it is minimal; it is 15 hours of extra shutdown period. The changes will come into effect on 1 July, which provides clubs with time to adjust their staffing roster to the new operating hours.

ACT Labor's reforms mean that the ACT will have the longest machine shutdown period in Australia. That was the advice that I got at the time, but Tasmania has just mandated a slightly longer time period. New South Wales and Victoria have a six-hour shutdown period from 4 am to 10 am. In South Australia, it is at least six hours in each 24-hour period. In Tasmania, they were considering a four-hour shutdown, and it sounds like they have passed it. In Western Australia, there is no shutdown because they do not have community clubs operating machines. In the ACT, these changes will increase the shutdown period from five hours a day to an average of seven hours a day.

The 2024 ACT Gambling Survey noted that comprehensive approaches to reducing gambling harm from EGMs should include an evidence-based harm prevention and reduction policy, legislation and measures, including but not limited to, reducing the availability and accessibility of high-risk gambling products. What the Greens are proposing adds only an additional six hours to Friday and Saturday nights.

I want to point out that the commitment that Ms Vassarotti referred to was mentioned by the Chief Minister in the Assembly on 3 September 2024. The minister responsible for implementing those changes was the minister for gambling reform, and that minister was a Greens minister. Notifying this regulatory change is a very easy process—easily drafted, and it does not need to go through cabinet. It is very intriguing that the responsibility for implementing that measure sat with the ACT Greens, and they did not follow through. I note that that member is not a member of the Assembly any longer and cannot defend his actions, but I would also note that it is the Greens resurrecting past or previous Assemblies.

It is worth noting that ACT Labor never went to an election with this as a commitment, and it is also worth noting that this was never part of a supply and confidence agreement. We are in a new Assembly. ACT Labor went to the election with an incredibly strong package for gambling reform, which I have introduced over the past two sittings of the Assembly.

I will not go into the details of the reforms that we have introduced, but I will say that the conversation on the night-time economy is very interesting, because what has changed, I think, over the past couple of years, and what the Canberra Liberals and the ACT Greens have tried to demonstrate, through inquiries, is the need to support a night-time economy. As I said to Ms Vassarotti, the reason that we took the decision about the extended opening hours on Friday and Saturday nights was purely to try to be able to support the night-time economy. I do agree with Ms Vassarotti that this potentially increases the risk of harm occurring in the community, but I would also note the risk of alcohol harm, which has not come up here.

I think we have come to the Assembly with reforms that are balanced and that respect and support the need to increase shutdown hours of poker machines with balancing the Friday and Saturday night-time economy. That is my position on this motion today.

MR PARTON(Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (11.52): We will not be supporting this motion put forward by Ms Vassarotti, which seeks to amend an instrument. I understand that it potentially places Dr Paterson in a difficult situation. What we are seeing happen today is the two biggest anti-gambling advocates trying to out-noble each other.

With respect to Ms Vassarotti's position, I would have suggested initially that it was naive. On reflection, I do not know that it is naive at all, because the Greens spokesperson on gaming knows exactly what she is doing in this space, as does the minister. From my reading of the situation, they both have a fixation on getting poker machines out of clubs in the ACT at any cost. I know that the motion that we are discussing today is about tinkering with opening hours, but, at the end of the day, that is the desired outcome—from my reading—from these two members.

In this cost-of-living crisis, combined with the never-ending raft of government changes to compliance, and increases in taxes and charges, the margins are non-existent. They are non-existent for most club entities. We are at a crunch time now—right now—for our clubs. If everything that Dr Paterson has laid on the table is progressed, there is no question that we will see multiple club closures. There will still be a sector of some description, but it will comprise a small number of large venues. It is not a “maybe”; that is an absolutely guaranteed outcome. As such, there is no possible way that, at this time, we can support a further crunching of clubs' ability to remain viable.

ClubsACT recently provided data—which is probably described as lobbying; I do not know—of a sector-wide audit which provided information regarding 19 club entities, and that covers 33 licensed venues. Eight of the 19 audited club entities made a loss in the 12-month period. Revenue grew by 4.2 per cent, but operating cash flow fell by 6.4 per cent. Capital spending fell by a whopping 43 per cent.

The sector remains strongly asset-backed, but property and buildings do not pay wages. They just do not. They do not pay utility bills. They do not pay technology costs. They do not pay maintenance or community grants. Those obligations require income and cash. The reality is that clubs with already declining cash generation and investment capacity cannot absorb further mandated costs and revenue reductions without affecting services, employment, community support or future viability. The changes that Ms

Vassarotti is talking about today would actually impact clubs in that way.

In this audited period, the clubs involved still paid more than \$90 million to staff and made nearly \$12 million in community contributions. I understand that we are debating a motion from Ms Vassarotti regarding amendments to an instrument, but I think it is impossible to speak about this sector without touching on the raft of measures that have been flagged by the minister.

I would like to mention to members a text that I received yesterday from a club CEO. I will not name him, but he says—and I will quote directly:

Good evening, Mark. I just purchased a packet of illegal cigarettes from premises approximately 50 metres from the entrance of the Legislative Assembly. Marisa cares more about the human rights of illegal tobacco salesmen and organised crime figures than she does for the dozens and dozens of staff that I will be letting go if her legislation goes ahead. Who is she protecting?

We will not be supporting the motion from Ms Vassarotti.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (11.56): I will be supporting this motion from Ms Vassarotti and I thank her for bringing it forward. In 2024, as we have heard, cabinet agreed to progress gaming room closure times between 2 am and 10 am, seven days a week, as a cornerstone policy to reduce gambling harm in our community. The Chief Minister announced this would happen.

Ms Cheyne: And the Greens minister was supposed to deliver.

MR EMERSON: It is funny, isn't it: I get the criticism, and I am neither a Greens minister nor a Labor minister. But lucky they did not, because now we can issue an instrument that is weaker than the instrument that was committed to in this chamber by the Chief Minister. That is the position that we are debating right now.

And the question is, why? Did Labor forget they had made this commitment? Did they hope everyone else would? Because for some reason, as part of their so-called nation-leading gambling reforms, they have now proposed closure times from 2 am to 9 am on Friday, and from 4 am to 9 am on Saturday, and 4 am to 10 am on Sunday. So, they have extended opening hours during some of the exact times most susceptible to gambling harm, compared to a commitment made by the Chief Minister in this chamber two years ago.

This is at the times when we are most likely to see problem gambling occur; in the early hours of the morning and first thing in the morning when venues open again.

Really, a 10 am opening time was too much to ask? It had to be 9 am for a couple of days per week? Did anyone actually lobby for that? And if they did, how on earth were they successful? This change of position cannot be informed by evidence. What could be the government's justification for walking back the commitment that was made in this chamber two years ago?

We have heard about supporting the night-time economy. The recent night-time economy inquiry heard from no one who thought supporting the night-time economy

meant increasing access to poker machines between the hours of 2 am and 4 am—or between the hours of 9 am and 10 am, for that matter. When we talk about wanting a thriving night-time economy, we are talking about people socialising with their friends, often in our small locally-owned venues. We are not talking about people sitting alone, disengaged from society, transfixed by a poker machine at 3 am.

If anything, these comments by the government raise massive red flags about its understanding of what constitutes a vibrant night-time economy. They also suggest the government has not been listening to Canberrans and to what they want, because when I surveyed Canberrans, a whopping 84 per cent of the 500-plus respondents supported mandatory gaming room closures from 2 am to 10 am. Of those respondents, 32 per cent wanted even stricter closure times.

84 per cent. Now, I get it, you know, it was not a scientific study. But 84 per cent is a massive figure, so even if that is off, that is a huge majority of people who support the measure that we are intending to reinstate with Ms Vassarotti's motion today.

Of all the policy issues I have canvassed with my community, the sentiment on gambling harm reduction policies is the most consistent. Canberrans want gambling money out of politics, and they desperately want much stronger, much more ambitious gambling harm reduction measures. They desperately want the government, and this Assembly more broadly, to show leadership on this. And they also want their government to back local night-time economy businesses like Bar Rochford, Gang Gang and the new Trust cafe here in Civic, which provide vibrant places for Canberrans to socialise after dark, without the insidious, antisocial, harmful impacts of poker machines killing the vibe.

But the government is not listening to the Canberrans it is supposed to represent, who overwhelmingly support the closure of pokies rooms between 2 am and 10 am. The question remains who is Labor listening to? Who are they prioritising ahead of their constituents, and for what? Canberrans are asking how it can be okay that the Canberra Labor Club, which owns around 12 per cent of poker machine licences in Canberra, is operated by and/or for the benefit of ACT Labor, the governing party. Decisions like this one, which nobody seems to have been publicly advocating for, to walk back an earlier commitment on gaming room closures, show the entrenched influence of the gambling industry.

Dr Paterson: We had a night-time economy inquiry running at the same time, saying how important it was to stimulate the night-time economy.

MR EMERSON: The minister has spoken to the importance of stimulating the night-time economy. I would love to see some evidence from anyone who presented that inquiry who said, "The best way to do that is to open up pokies rooms from 2 am to 4 am on weekends because that is what a vibrant night-time economy looks like; it looks like me and my mates at the end of a night out, going into a pokies room while we are still a little bit drunk, pouring a bunch of money into the machine. That is how we stimulate our night-time economy." It means people alone, walking in late at night—perhaps they did not get there late at night, perhaps they got there at 10 pm—but staying till two is not enough; they have got to stay till 4 am on the weekends.

The minister knows that it is not the type of night-time economy that she wants to stimulate or advocate for. The clubs are already ripping into it. I do not understand why the government is making this move. It is a silly move. It does not make any sense, and so I applaud Ms Vassarotti's leadership in attempting to put our community first by reverting to the original commitment agreed by cabinet and announced by the Chief Minister to closures every day from 2 am to 10 am. I will be supporting her amendment.

Labor's vote against this amendment speaks both to priorities and to integrity, and, frankly, to a level of disdain for people in our community experiencing gambling harm and for the people they have been elected to represent. The government could have quietly let Ms Vassarotti's amendment sail through without protesting, and it is incredibly disappointing that they chose to bring this on for debate and block it today instead.

The Liberal Party's position on this is unsurprising. The Liberal Party under Mark Parton is about as pro-gambling a party as you can get. Mr Parton loves his slogans. It is the "loves-a-slap Liberal Party", and this vote reflects that. I get that Mr Parton has this larrikin image and that having a slap, having a punt, encouraging other people to do the same, is part of that brand. But other members of the Liberal Party need to think about whether that is a brand they actually back in themselves. Is that a brand that their constituents want to see reflected in this place, in the decisions of their party? Is this actually what Canberrans want? Or is this just what Mr Parton wants?

Because I do not think it reflects the needs, preferences and what is best for our community. The ACT Gambling Support Service is running a campaign right now saying "Back your mates, not their bets." That is targeted at exactly the people that are stuck in Mr Parton's algorithm; exactly the people who need to see leadership from people like Mr Parton; from larrikins. That is exactly why they have used that terminology: "Back your mates, not their bets." But at every opportunity, the Liberal Party is backing their bets instead of backing their mates. And it just does not stack up.

Through you, Madam Assistant Speaker, the Liberal Party has an opportunity to actually reflect on what policies would be supported by a majority of Canberrans.

Mr Parton interjecting—

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Mr Parton.

MR EMERSON: And I get it, we are hearing from different people. This is one opportunity to vote a certain way, but there will be more. And I call on the Liberal Party to actually be a viable alternative. Be a credible opposition that people can vote for—not just the people who have voted for you for the last 25 years, because it has not put you in government. And it is on issues like this that people get sick of hearing the exact same things over and over and over again; sick of hearing talking points from an industry that is harming Canberrans. And we know it. We have got the data to show it.

So, what are we doing in here, when we come in and say, "Look, this will be the end of the industry." We have heard a lot of that fear-mongering in the last week, and this is one where we are going to hear it more and more.

And look, it is important to engage with the clubs. I am engaging with them too. None of them have raised this as a priority. So why not let this go through? Why not actually close gaming rooms from 2 am to 10 am, as was committed? And so, yes, I am going to call it out, and I will repeatedly call it out, because the Canberrans I am hearing from want this called out. They want to see everyone in the Assembly acting in their best interests rather than acting to peddle vested interests that are contrary to what is best for Canberrans.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (12.05): I want to see a vibrant night-time economy too. One aspect of the night-time economy brought up by the inquiry was the need for activities in our town centres that do not involve drinking and gambling. If that is what the night-time economy is about, let's see the government support recreation and culture in our town centres to bring people together, to come out and to support our cafes and restaurants. I support what Ms Vassarotti and Mr Emerson have said, and I will be supporting Ms Vassarotti's motion.

MS VASSAROTTI (Kurrajong) (12.05): Well, it is very disappointing to note that the likely outcome of this motion is that it will not have majority support and it will not be supported by the two major parties. This is not surprising, but I am really distressed that it will create some unnecessary harm in the community. And I note that the minister has noted as much. She talks about alcohol harm and, look, I am really pleased that we will actually have an amendment to the liquor bill coming at some point. I will be addressing that as well. So, it is certainly not something that is not being progressed by me.

I did want to particularly pick up the comments of the minister in relation to the previous minister. He is not here to defend himself, but I was witness to the ongoing frustration of that minister as he worked diligently and hard, collaboratively and with great effort around responding to the evidence base to deliver reform—while a then-backbencher criticised the lack of action, while he was being frustrated in cabinet to try and get anything up.

The issue of the instrument and the agreement around operating hours happened in September. Caretaker conventions started on 14 September. I am not exactly sure what the date was, but while an instrument is more simple to get in place, it needs to get both the signature of the minister and the Chief Minister. It was not—

Dr Paterson: The Chief Minister supported it. Why did the minister not produce it?

MS VASSAROTTI: So, it was a very short period in which to get the instrument up, and we would have actually expected that it would have been progressed quite soon after. But here we are, two years later, and while the minister has brought to the Assembly a reform package over the last couple of months, we actually have not had any gambling reform put in place over the last two years. I reflect back to that backbencher who was sitting on the backbench last term, and what they would have been saying in terms of the progress to date.

The changes that we will be looking at are really complex and they will need inquiry. This one was easy. This was really easy. It could have delivered a simple measure that reduced harm—not in July, but in March—and actually delivered a reduction of harm,

particularly when we know that the people who are in these venues at this time are the most vulnerable.

And once again, it is really disappointing in terms of the response of the Canberra Liberals. And again, I would really like you to consider when you are progressing issues, particularly around issues such as male suicide, to look at the really significant evidence in terms of the impact of gambling and gambling harm for particularly vulnerable groups.

So, as I noted, very disappointing. I am not naive, as some members in this chamber potentially considered. This was an important thing to bring to the table. We need to be very clear, and bring to the Assembly the importance of people understanding who is responding to the evidence base and who is not.

Question put:

That Ms Vassarotti's motion be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes, 6

Andrew Braddock
Fiona Carrick
Jo Clay
Thomas Emerson
Laura Nuttall
Rebecca Vassarotti

Noes, 19

Andrew Barr	Deborah Morris
Chiaka Barry	Suzanne Orr
Yvette Berry	Mark Parton
Peter Cain	Marisa Paterson
Leanne Castley	Michael Pettersson
Tara Cheyne	Chris Steel
Ed Cocks	Rachel Stephen-Smith
Jeremy Hanson	Caitlin Tough
Elizabeth Lee	Taimus Werner-Gibbings
James Milligan	

Question resolved in the negative.

Sitting suspended from 12.16 to 2.00 pm.

Questions without notice **Crime—knife crime—Lanyon High**

MR PARTON: My question is to the Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services. Minister, can you confirm whether there was an incident at Lanyon High School today where a year 8 student was allegedly stabbed with a knife?

DR PATERSON: Yes, I can confirm that.

MR PARTON: Minister, are you, or perhaps the education minister, able to tell us what support has been given to the victim, their family and the school community, and

what advice has been given to the school community?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I am happy to take this question. As Mr Parton has indicated, an incident occurred this morning at Lanyon High School. ACT Policing were called to the school and they have been managing their response to the incident. The incident resulted in student injury requiring medical support from emergency services, and the student was transported to hospital with non-life-threatening injuries by ACT Ambulance Service paramedics. My thoughts are obviously with that student and their family. Schools should be a safe place for everyone—students and staff.

The school has been in contact with families about this incident. However, unfortunately the PHP global vulnerability that I was talking about this morning affected the capacity of the Sentral messaging system, so the message to families was unable to go out in as timely a way as we would have hoped. As a result of the vulnerability, Sentral messaging and Parent Portal services were temporarily disabled this morning as a precautionary measure, but I can advise that messaging has now been restored and Sentral are working to restore Parent Portal as soon as possible. I understand that a message has gone out. The school has been in contact with families about the incident and a further email will go out before 3 pm this afternoon. I understand this incident has caused some distress among parents at the school, and particularly the delay in being able to get in touch with all parents. I very much understand, sympathise and apologise for that distress.

ACT Policing is of course encouraging anyone with information about the incident to report to Crime Stoppers, and the school is providing supports for students, staff and families impacted.

MRS MORRIS: Minister, has the person of interest been apprehended, and is the person of interest subject to any bail or good behaviour orders?

DR PATERSON: There is obviously an ongoing police investigation, so it is a matter for ACT Policing at this point in time. I am sure they will issue a media release once that information is known.

Small business—ACT Small Business Strategy

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the minister for business. Last month, the government published the 2026 progress update for the ACT Small Business Strategy. It noted that one action item, to commission research about business survival rates, is still yet to commence, three years now after the strategy has already commenced. Given the recent deterioration in local business survival rates, why hasn't this commenced, and when will it?

MR PETTERSSON: I will take that on notice.

MS CASTLEY: Why did the 2026 update report that this item has yet to commence, when the 2025 update reported that it was already in progress?

MR PETTERSSON: I will take that on notice.

Corrections—restraint of detainees during childbirth and medical procedures

MS VASSAROTTI: My question is to the Minister for Corrections. The treatment of pregnant women in custody has become the subject of national scrutiny through the federal parliamentary inquiry into the Crimes Amendment (Prohibiting Shackling During Childbirth) Bill 2026, which has examined restraints during labour and childbirth across Australian jurisdictions. The inquiry did not recommend prohibiting the practice via commonwealth intervention, noting that this is the remit for states and territories. Our local inquiries have found that this is not explicitly banned, and there have been instances of women being shackled during hospital treatment. Can the minister confirm that ACT legislation or policy does allow for restraints on a detainee during childbirth or other medical procedures or transport to these procedures?

MS TOUGH: I thank the member for her question. It is something that, since becoming Minister for Corrections, I have had a real interest in understanding how this works here in the ACT, particularly with talk nationally around the shackling of women during childbirth and the recent case in Queensland. I think every mother felt particularly strongly around that case. I have been talking to my officials, and with pregnant women in the ACT we have quite—I guess in a good way—a small number of women who enter the AMC pregnant or with young babies, so most things are done on a case-by-case basis. I will take the detail on notice on what exactly the policy says. I just do not have the exact policy, but it is something that I am acutely aware of.

MS VASSAROTTI: This is something you may also need to take on notice. If this does occur or is permitted, would it be reported?

MS TOUGH: I will take that one on notice.

MS CLAY: Minister, will the government commit to explicitly banning the use of restraints during medical treatment and transfer to medical treatment?

MS TOUGH: While I cannot announce government policy during question time, as I have said before, I will take on notice what the current policy is and undertake to see if there is anything underway at the moment.

Suburban Land Agency—Affordable Home Purchase Scheme

MS CARRICK: My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, families in the Affordable Home Purchase Scheme have now endured years of delays, financial hardship and significant stress while waiting for homes they still cannot occupy. I have been contacted by purchasers who have been blocked from having their own independent inspectors inspect their homes before signing completion notices. These purchasers are now being threatened with breach of contract notices and potential buyback action if they do not make final payments on homes they say remain incomplete. Chief Minister, what are you doing to ensure owners are able to have their own independent inspections completed before signing completion certificates?

MR BARR: I think the matters were reasonably extensively canvassed on ABC radio this morning by the chief executive of the SLA. We are obviously applying the highest

level of resource within the SLA, including the time of the chief executive and a number of staff, to working with the remaining small group of individuals who are having the unfortunate experience that Ms Carrick has outlined. The behaviour of the builders in this instance is not acceptable. There are a range of legal avenues available under the standard MBA contracts that are in place. I understand it is a complex legal matter. It is not for me to provide legal advice and I certainly would not do so nor seek to do so in answer to a question in question time, but there is individual case management in place to endeavour to resolve the issues, the legitimate issues that Ms Carrick has raised on behalf of those individuals.

MS CARRICK: Chief Minister, what are you doing to ensure buyback clauses will not be invoked on these properties?

MR BARR: Well, again, the SLA is working very hard with the individuals and the builders to seek to find outcomes that avoid that situation, and I think Mr Davey was very clear about that on ABC radio this morning. I do not sit above the law. I do not have omnipresent powers to address issues between a builder and a homeowner under a legal contract but I would expect the law to be enforced. There are, of course, all of the avenues available under consumer law for these individuals and there is individual support being provided by the SLA, including, as Mr Davey outlined on radio this morning, the SLA providing its own inspection service as well.

MR PARTON: Chief Minister, what other action will you take to resolve the ongoing disputes between purchasers, the builder and the SLA so that these families and individuals can finally move into the homes that they have spent years waiting for?

MR BARR: I have outlined the actions. The SLA has individual case management, down to a handful now. I acknowledge it is still a difficult issue for those handful, but the work to get them into their homes is underway. And of course, the government is meeting their rent and has done for some time. This is an unfortunate situation. I do not think anyone wishes that it had occurred. The scheme itself, I think across more than 180 participants, has generally been positive but there are certainly lessons to be learned, and we appear to have one builder in particular who is being very difficult to deal with, both for the SLA and for the home purchasers.

Government procurement—conduct in procurement

MR PARTON: My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, your government's response to Operation Kingfisher follows findings that the former head of the Education Directorate and the former chief of staff of the education minister engaged in serious corrupt conduct in relation to the Campbell Primary School modernisation project.

The Master Builders Association has condemned your response, saying it has “effectively marked its own homework, declared ‘nothing to see here’, and expected the Canberra community to simply move on”. After the report was released, your government asked directors-general to assure the Acting Head of Service that no similar probity issues existed in current procurements. Directors-general simply reviewed their own directorates and reported back that there were no concerns. This is the very definition of marking your own homework.

Chief Minister, why has the ACT government relied on secret internal reviews rather than supporting a fully independent, comprehensive review of government procurements across all directorates?

MR BARR: We have an extensive process underway. I reject the MBA's assertions.

MR PARTON: Chief Minister, apart from asking yourselves, what evidence can you provide to demonstrate that the serious issues of corruption identified by the Integrity Commission were an isolated incident and, indeed, not business as usual?

MR BARR: I reject the premise of the opposition leader's question. Processes are underway. We have independent agencies, including the Auditor-General and the Integrity Commission. If there are any issues that anyone wishes to refer about any procurement in the history of self-government, they can refer them to those agencies, if they are not satisfied with the processes that are underway now.

MRS MORRIS: Chief Minister, why has your government chosen to ignore the serious corrupt conduct findings stemming from the former Deputy Chief Minister's office, rather than taking the genuine systemic reform needed to restore public confidence in this government?

MR BARR: We have not ignored that. There is a comprehensive range of processes underway, including significant reforms to procurement that have passed through this place. Undoubtedly, everyone is very interested in this, including every member of this place, every stakeholder group and, indeed, the independent oversight agencies. The process is ongoing. There are still further reviews being undertaken, and there will no doubt be further discussion and commentary. But I reject the assertion in the member's question.

Alexander Maconochie Centre—breastfeeding

MS CLAY: My question is to the Minister for Corrections. The 2019 *Human rights principles for ACT correctional centres* states:

Unless the best interest of the child require otherwise (with a crucial consideration being the safety of the child), a mother who is a detainee has the opportunity for her baby or young child to remain with her, and if not, full supports should be provided for breastfeeding and open contact.

Where mothers are incarcerated in the AMC, does the AMC have the ability to keep babies with their mothers, and support breastfeeding?

MS TOUGH: I thank Ms Clay for the question. Similar to the previous question, it is something I have taken quite an interest in just recently, since taking this portfolio. Given the comparatively small number of women in custody compared to other jurisdictions, we do not have a lot of pregnant women or women with babies and infants in the AMC for long periods of time, particularly around the time that they give birth—but I acknowledge it does happen. As a result, support arrangements are generally considered on an individual basis rather than through a dedicated mothers and babies

unit like we see in other states.

But it is something that is considered, and it is available. There is the ACT Corrective Services women's and children's program under the policy, which does allow for that flexibility and individual case-by-case management.

We do have supports for pregnant women and women who are breastfeeding, as well, which are considered on a case-by-case basis—with flexibility available where operationally appropriate, which can include daily visits with the infants during the unlock period in a private room, with mothers supported to maintain contact with their children through family visits and other approved means in accordance with the Corrections Management Act.

MS CLAY: Are there any instances in the last five years where women have not been able to have support for breastfeeding, in the AMC?

MS TOUGH: I will take the detail of that on notice.

MS VASSAROTTI: Do you have information about how many mothers of infants are in custody, on remand or incarcerated?

MS TOUGH: I will take the exact details on notice, so I have got the right figures.

Government procurement—conduct in procurement—Campbell Primary School

MRS MORRIS: My question is to the Chief Minister. Master Builders ACT has called for clear pathways to remediation and redress for local businesses that suffered loss or harm due to your government's corrupt conduct during the Campbell Primary School tender process. Given that Manteena faced—

Mr Barr: Point of an order. I think that is an assertion that is not backed by fact—to call the government corrupt.

MR SPEAKER: Could you rephrase that, Mrs Morris? I will get some advice on it, but labelling the whole government as corrupt—

MRS MORRIS: Corrupt conduct, as established by the Integrity Commissioner.

MR SPEAKER: The specific language was “your government's corrupt conduct”. I will get some advice on that. It is borderline. I think there was an inference in the way that it was expressed that the whole government is corrupt. That is certainly not the case. I ask that it be rephrased and limited to the specific incident. Thank you, Mrs Morris.

MRS MORRIS: Master Builders ACT has called for clear pathways to remediation for local businesses that suffered loss or harm due to the corrupt conduct that occurred within the former Deputy Chief Minister's office during the Campbell Primary School tender process. Given that Manteena faced unfair outcomes through no fault of their own, will your government issue a formal apology to Manteena? And, if not, why?

MR BARR: The government will take advice on the legality of those matters and what implications there would be for the territory before making any further comment.

MRS MORRIS: Chief Minister, how can local Canberra businesses have any confidence in competing for territory contracts when your government has engaged in corrupt conduct and there is currently no—

Mr Barr: Again—

MR SPEAKER: Mrs Morris, I just ruled that, if we are going to talk about this, let's be specific about the incident and not try to create the inference that this is broader than it is. Be very careful with the question that you are asking.

MRS MORRIS: Thank you. Chief Minister, how can local Canberra businesses have any confidence in competing for territory contracts when corrupt conduct in the former Deputy Chief Minister's office has occurred and there is currently no confidential independent pathway for businesses to raise concerns about live tenders?

MR BARR: There are multiple pathways, and thousands of local businesses are participating in procurement processes across all government agencies every single year.

MR PARTON: Chief Minister, how many other local business have unfairly suffered loss or harm from corrupt conduct that may or may not have occurred and may or may not have involved your government?

Mr Steel: A point of order—

MR SPEAKER: That is hypothetical. If you reflect on it, Mr Parton, I think it is hypothetical.

Mr Parton: As the question was written, it would have been ruled out of order.

MR SPEAKER: I am ruling it out of order. You are asking a hypothetical question.

Mr Parton: So we cannot say that there has been corrupt conduct or we cannot allege that there may or may not have been?

MR SPEAKER: Anyway, I have ruled.

ACT public service—staff conduct

MR EMERSON: My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, in response to a budget estimates question taken on notice this year, you indicated that 69 separate misconduct processes relating to ACT public sector staff were suspended over the last five years because the person being investigated resigned from the public service.

Why does section 72 of the Public Sector Management Standards allow a senior executive to receive a termination payout of at least six months salary, even if their

employment ends while they are under investigation for misconduct?

MR BARR: I will need to get legal advice on that matter, Mr Speaker. I will take it on notice.

MR EMERSON: Chief Minister, was the outgoing Head of Service under investigation at the time of her resignation?

MR BARR: I have nothing to suggest that is the case. I do not think that is a particularly dignified assertion to make under parliamentary privilege.

Mr Emerson: A point of order. It is not an assertion; it is a question.

MR SPEAKER: Continue your answer and just answer the question—not reflect on the question.

MR BARR: I am not aware of any suggestion of that account. Whilst on that basis I cannot categorically rule everything out, I find the intent of the question, and what it is undoubtedly now going to raise, to be quite offensive. So, I will say: absolutely not to my knowledge.

MS LEE: Chief Minister, how much leave did the former Head of Service take, and what form of leave was taken immediately preceding her resignation?

MR BARR: Several weeks of sick leave and several weeks of personal leave.

Sport and recreation—swimming pools

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: My question is to the Minister for Sport and Recreation. Minister, how is the government upgrading government-owned public pools?

MR STEEL: I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for his question and his interest in aquatic facilities in the ACT.

During the winter season the ACT government has invested over \$400,000 in upgrades across three seasonal pools to keep the facilities ready for the summer period, as we see thousands of Canberrans flocking to them at places like Dickson, Canberra Olympic pool and Manuka. I also joined Mr Werner-Gibbings at the Erindale Leisure Centre just recently to announce the scope of upgrades to that facility, which we know is well used by the Tuggeranong community.

Public pools are a vital community asset, particularly in a territory that is not next to the ocean; although of course we do have some fantastic riverine environments in which to swim as well. We have undertaken a range of upgrades over winter at three seasonal pools, as well as a general program of maintenance at facilities at Gungahlin and Stromlo. Our current government pools were mostly built prior to self-government, and they have been cornerstones of our communities for generations. Our commitment to upgrading our existing pools will ensure that future generations of Canberrans can continue to benefit from aquatic recreation in the territory.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Minister, what upgrades have been undertaken and are planned for at Erindale Leisure Centre?

MR STEEL: I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for his question. The ACT Labor government has invested \$1.1 million to deliver immediate upgrades and long-term planning for the Erindale Leisure Centre. ACT Labor committed in 2024 to upgrading the facilities at Erindale, and last week's announcement demonstrates our commitment to delivering these improved facilities so that Tuggeranong can continue to enjoy this fantastic community asset. A substantial refurbishment and modernisation of the gym and fitness area is included in the upgrades, with all new equipment complemented by an interior refresh, including flooring, lighting and painting. Accessibility improvements will also see the installation of automatic doors, something that was raised by the community. Members have consistently identified improvements to the gym facilities as a top priority, and the government expects that these upgrades will allow for a growth in membership and utilisation.

The package progresses design, development and planning required to secure the facilities for the long term, and this includes improvements to the change rooms, steam room and structural infrastructure such as the roof. Community feedback has helped to identify the priority upgrades, which will grow membership over time, while planning for future improvements. To support this, \$197,000 has been set aside to directly fund smaller scale capital upgrades, as requested by users.

MS BERRY: Minister, what upgrades have been completed at Dickson pool?

MR STEEL: I thank Ms Berry for her question and recognise her longstanding commitment and work in this area. At Dickson pool improvements were undertaken during the winter shutdown period to ensure no patrons were affected by the upgrade works. Some of the upgrades that have been completed there include three new colourful electric barbecues, which will help the staff and patrons to enjoy the facilities. There have also been landscaping works, which I went out to see earlier this week at the pool, which have seen a major upgrade to the grass and tree areas, which are, of course, a great feature of the pool and addition to the aquatic facilities.

If you have ever been to Dickson pool, you will see how much everyone enjoys using the outdoor garden spaces for recreational use. They get incredibly well used, and they do need to be refreshed. It is great to see that work that has been undertaken there. Repainting of the toddler pool concourse has also been undertaken, and we really look forward to seeing thousands of patrons using our outdoor pools, including Dickson, over the summer.

Government procurement—conduct in procurement

MR PARTON: My question is for the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, Operation Kingfisher identified how easy it was for external parties to influence ACT government procurement processes. The government must now demonstrate that its decisions are driven by transparency, fair competition and value for money, not by the political influence of any union or industry group.

Will you rule out allowing the CFMEU's political influence or objections to stand in

the way of reforms that are needed to ensure independent and transparent government procurement?

MR BARR: Of course I will. The government has never been influenced by the CFMEU.

MR PARTON: Has the government received representations from the CFMEU opposing changes to procurement arrangements following Operation Kingfisher, and will the Chief Minister disclose the substance of those representations?

MR BARR: I certainly have not received any, Mr Speaker.

MR CAIN: Will the Chief Minister commit to making any changes to procurement arrangements on the basis of independent evidence and the public interest, regardless of whether the CFMEU supports those changes?

MR BARR: Yes, the changes that have been made to date, and changes that will be made in the future would be in the public interest.

Building and construction—property developer licensing scheme

MR PARTON: My question to the Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development is in regard to developer licensing. Minister, you have placed a great deal of importance on individual personal responsibility and the fact that the buck must stop with someone. Can I ask: has the government considered government minister licensing legislation, meaning that you, as Treasurer, would be personally liable for any ACT deficit, as well as the \$77 million on the failed HRIMS project and the tens of millions that were wasted on the MyWay+ project, for which you have personally been censured in this chamber? If this government hasn't—

Mr Pettersson: A point of order, Mr Speaker. Questions should not contain ironical expressions.

MR SPEAKER: Looking at that, I am not sure whether it is ironical or not. I will give it a little bit of thought, and I will get some advice and see what the Clerk thinks. It is on the borderline of it. I will allow the question. I accept that it has a political tinge to it, but a lot of questions do, in question time. I will allow the question.

MR PARTON: Mr Speaker, I have completely forgotten where I was up to, so I might just go back a little. Can I ask: has the government considered government minister licensing legislation, meaning that you, as Treasurer, would be personally liable for any ACT deficit, as well as the \$77 million on the failed HRIMS project and the tens of millions that were wasted on the MyWay+ project, for which you have personally been censured in this chamber? If this government hasn't considered such personal liabilities on ministers, can I ask: why not?

MR STEEL: We are accountable to the parliament, and we are accountable to the people at elections. What I have always sought to do, as minister, is make sure that consumers are protected. That is why we have introduced the property developer licensing scheme, introduced by Minister Vassarotti, when she was the minister for

sustainable development, and continued by our government, with the commencement starting from 1 October.

It is because we do not want to see an Opal Tower in the ACT. We do not want to see that. It is critical, therefore, that we ensure that there is a chain of accountability that includes those who stand to benefit most from a development, particularly the larger-scale residential developments in the territory. We have seen defects in residential developments here in the ACT, and enough is enough. We are going to hold property developers accountable for their work, like we already hold builders accountable, and other occupations that are currently licensed. We are also looking at extending that licensing to other occupations, particularly those occupations that are of high risk in residential developments, like waterproofers, brick- and block-laying, and carpentry, for example. That is supported by industry.

I appreciate that property developers do not want to be held accountable for their work, but our government committed to introduce this scheme, and we are delivering this scheme. I appreciate that property developers do not necessarily like our government as a result of that. But I can live with that because we are protecting consumers, the people who we represent and to whom we are accountable.

MR PARTON: Why is strict personal liability good for developers, but not for you?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. We are accountable. I just said that, in the answer to the previous question. What we are seeing in the ACT is far too many defects on class 2 buildings, apartment buildings in the territory, and where consumers have had to pay tens of thousands or hundreds of thousands of dollars to rectify those defects. Owners corporations have spent, in some cases, years trying to get an outcome to have those defects addressed by chasing the developers, builders and nominees through the courts. We have a system now where we can hold the property developers accountable, and we are moving towards incentivising defect liability insurance so that those defects do not occur in the first place.

This is, in part, a preventive scheme, to try and stop this kind of behaviour occurring in the first place. I recall that the Liberals did not vote against the property developer licensing bill when it was introduced. But they spoke against it in the chamber at the time, and now they are continuing to spend a lot of time in this place debating and speaking against the scheme. This is an important scheme to make sure that we boost consumer confidence so that when they buy a home, it is well built. That is critically important for the trust in the construction sector that we want to build, to encourage more people to buy a home off the plan.

MRS MORRIS: How can the market possibly deliver the 30,000 new dwellings by 2030, including all the missing middle homes, when we only have 14 currently registered developers?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question. That reflects that the scheme has only just started this month, and you do not need to be licensed until you have an active development. A large number of applications are currently being assessed beyond those, and we expect that number to grow over time. Of course, there are requirements that need to be met under the licensing scheme, including having a ratings assessment

undertaken, which is part of the integrity of the licensing scheme which we think is really important.

Critical to achieving our target—it is not your target; you were not interested in building more homes—of enabling 30,000 homes, which is our target—

Mr Cocks: A point of order, Mr Speaker. The minister, very clearly now, is debating the point. He is making assertions about not being interested in building more homes which are patently untrue. I would ask that he respond to the question, rather than debating.

MR SPEAKER: Minister, stick to the answer. The Liberal Party policy is not—

MR STEEL: Part of achieving a goal like enabling 30,000 homes is making sure that the community has confidence that, when they go and purchase a home, particularly off the plan, it is not going to be riddled with defects. That is part of why we are not just focusing on planning reform, land release and direct investment in non-market housing—although we are—we are also making sure that we are building consumer confidence, and property developer licensing is part of that, as well as extending licensing to other occupations.

Health—specialist waiting times

MR PARTON: My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, recent media reporting has revealed that approximately 65,000 Canberrans are waiting for a specialist outpatient appointment, with some wait times now in years. Noting there is an outpatient services review underway, what immediate measures are you considering, to reduce wait times? Or do Canberrans just need to get used to waiting years for an appointment?

DR PATERSON: No. And if Mr Parton had actually attended the briefing that we put on, on Monday, then he would have had some of this information relayed to him about the significant work that is going on to reform our outpatient waiting list. I spoke to Mr Parton's staff and Ms Vassarotti and her staff on Monday about the work, which is in line with recommendations made by Michael Walsh in the Walsh review.

CHS has recently commissioned an outpatient review, looking at all the waiting lists, reviewing referral criteria and examining efficiencies that can be implemented using better technology. This first tranche of the review will develop an evidence-based outpatient clinical services plan for Canberra Health Services, including assessment of current service performance; future service modelling; demand forecasting; and recommendations to improve access, patient flow and long-term sustainability. This is expected to be completed in 2027.

We have also established an outpatient oversight committee which includes clinicians and consumers, to oversee this work and develop a systemic program of outpatient waiting list audits and reviews, as well as a review of critical referral criteria across all outpatient services. That work has begun and will continue to progress over the next 12 months.

MR PARTON: Minister, what immediate measures will you implement to reduce clinically unacceptable wait times while the outpatient services review is underway?

DR PATERSON: Yes, so that work is happening immediately. We have clinical reviews happening for each of the outpatient waitlists. Well, they are starting. They are starting with one; they will work through all the outpatient lists. So, we have started and begun that process. That is reviewing the clinical criteria for each of the waiting lists, and then those individuals on the waiting lists will be contacted regarding whether they meet the criteria or not. Many individuals on the waiting list will have gone and received treatment through private hospitals or gone back to their GP to seek other medical solutions, in the time.

We recognise that there are 65,000 people on our waiting lists, and this is not acceptable. Addressing this is exactly the work that has been ongoing from Canberra Health Services. This is addressing the recommendations of the Walsh review.

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, will you commit to publishing regular specialty-by-specialty data on waiting times, patient numbers and progress in reducing the backlog?

DR PATERSON: Well, that is what we want to get to. So, that is why we are reviewing the clinical criteria for each of the waiting lists. We will then review each waiting list, and then we will—

Mr Parton: How long with the waiting list be, by then?

DR PATERSON: Well, this is the work that is happening over the next 12 months. This is the work that we are committed to. We want to be publicly reporting this. At the moment, there is not much point because the wait lists are pretty inaccurate. So, what we want to do is work through this process of the Walsh recommendations to get to the point where we can publicly report outpatient waiting lists to the community.

Suburban Land Agency—Affordable Home Purchase Scheme

MR PARTON: My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, my colleagues—including Ms Carrick—have been receiving communication and have been consulting for years with Canberrans who signed up to the SLA's affordable housing scheme in Whitlam, some all the way back in 2022, yet now, in late 2026, despite the SLA promising that those people would be in their homes by 2023, they have not moved in. We understand that the government is covering the ongoing rental costs for 11 participants in the scheme. One of those unfortunate victims said to me this morning:

It has been a wrecking ball in my life, both professionally and personally. This is cruel and inhumane. I want my life back. I can't get anywhere talking to the SLA, they don't care at all.

Chief Minister, why does your government not seem to care about the damage done to these lives?

MR BARR: As I said in response to Ms Carrick's question, the government certainly acknowledges the difficult circumstances that have come largely from a breakdown, as

it would appear, in the relationship between a builder and those home owners. The SLA is actively involved at the highest level in seeking to resolve the situation and has provided significant financial assistance. Everyone wants these matters to be resolved as quickly as possible, and, as the CEO said on radio this morning, many of them will be in the coming weeks, as those construction projects conclude. The SLA will continue to provide individual support throughout this process until it is resolved.

MR PARTON: Chief Minister, why is the government not covering the legal fees of the victims of this failed scheme, given your effective admission of guilt through the rent payments?

MR BARR: I will seek some advice in relation to legal fees. I am certainly not announcing policy here. We may not be in a position to make uncapped guarantees around legal fee matters, but certainly the SLA is seeking to work with the two contracted parties, being the soon-to-be home owners and the builder, in order to resolve this matter. It would be fair to observe that this has gone on for longer than anyone would have liked. We hope it will be resolved, and the SLA is working very hard to make that happen.

MS CARRICK: Chief Minister, what will the final ACT government's cost of covering the rent payments for the victims of this scheme be?

MR BARR: It would certainly be in the thousands of dollars. I will not know that until the process is concluded. I understand, from memory, that a budget appropriation was provided at one point, reflecting this unfortunate situation, but I will not be able to report on that until all the matters are resolved. The agency would then normally report in their annual report in relation to that matter.

Health and Community Services Directorate—staffing

MR PARTON: My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, the ACT public service is undergoing significant leadership changes, including the departure of the Head of Service and the Director-General of Infrastructure Canberra, while the Health and Community Services Directorate is pursuing voluntary redundancies.

What assessment has the government made of the operational and service delivery risks arising from these leadership changes and workforce reductions?

MR BARR: Certainly, in relation to workforce management, directors-general are undertaking that task as we go through a period of change. This of course follows some machinery of government changes at the beginning of this Legislative Assembly term.

In relation to executives retiring, that is a normal part of the life cycle both of individuals and agencies, and we have in place, obviously, acting arrangements and recruitment processes to fill those couple of vacancies.

MR PARTON: Chief Minister, what measurable savings does the government expect from the Health and Community Services Directorate's redundancy program, and how will it demonstrate that those savings will not compromise frontline services or increase reliance on contractors?

MR BARR: The agency seeks to operate within its appropriated budget that this place appropriated in the sittings last month. In relation to use of contractors, there will be some occasions where certain specialised work is undertaken, but it must be undertaken within that agency's budget.

MR COCKS: Chief Minister, will you provide the Assembly with a consolidated account of the expected savings, implementation costs, positions affected and service delivery risks associated with the redundancy program?

MR BARR: Each agency would report against that in relation to its output classes and its annual reports, and through the annual budget processes.

ACT women's plan

MISS NUTTALL: My question is to the Minister for Women. Minister, on 15 September Minister Pettersson stated that the government is in the "early stages of developing the next women's plan for gender equity". Minister, considering that the plan is due to be implemented in almost two months, in 2027, at what stage is the development for the new plan? And has the government began consultation on the plan?

MS TOUGH: I thank Miss Nuttall for that question. Coming into the role as a new minister is very exciting. There are a lot of things to learn and get my head around. One of the things that I have been having active conversations with officials about is the next women's plan. I have started having some early conversations with different parts of the sector around what that looks like. I am hoping to have something in place to consult on very soon, but please be assured that it is something I am working on.

MISS NUTTALL: Is the plan to release the women's plan at the start of 2027? And if so, is consultation far enough along at this point in time?

MS TOUGH: I cannot announce government policy in question time, unfortunately.

MS VASSAROTTI: Will the new women's plan for gender equity address corrections reforms, including banning restraints during hospital visits?

MS TOUGH: I cannot announce government policy in question time, but it is something I can definitely consider and could be considered in that process.

ACT Ambulance Service—staffing

MR BRADDOCK: My question is to the Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services. Minister, a contract valued at \$267,530 was awarded by the ACT government to consultants to "consider opportunities to improve the operational efficiency of the ACT Ambulance Service." This has created a great deal of concern with some ambulance officers. Minister, what does this contract mean for the ACT Ambulance Service workforce?

DR PATERSON: This is follow-on work following the budget process to look at the staffing of ACT Ambulance Service. The idea behind this work is that it will inform

future budget business cases. We know ACT Ambulance Service is a workforce that is under considerable strain at the moment. We announced 32 new positions in the last budget, but one of the recommendations by Treasury through that process was to have a more detailed look at the ambulance service and the staffing profile. So that is what that money is designed to do. I would add that we have been very transparent, working very closely with the union on this and working closely with staff as well. That work will be carried out I believe before the end of the year, or early next year, to inform subsequent budget processes.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, why was it necessary for the government to acquire an external review when a roster review and workforce strategy were both completed by in-house staff with expert knowledge?

DR PATERSON: Yes, so I guess it is a bit more extensive. The roster review looks specifically at the rostering. This will look at the staffing. As the roster review highlighted, there are challenges with staffing in ACTAS. So it was determined that there needed to be more analysis done to understand exactly what is needed to support ACTAS paramedics.

MISS NUTTALL: Minister, how will staff and their representatives be able to provide input into the process?

DR PATERSON: I will take that on board. I will take that on notice, sorry.

Suburban infrastructure

MS BERRY: My question is to the Minister for City and Government Services. Minister, can you update the Assembly on how the ACT government is investing in everyday infrastructure to improve Canberra's suburbs?

MS CHEYNE: I thank Ms Berry for the question. While major infrastructure projects often attract the most attention, and we have plenty of those underway, we also know that some of the improvements that matter most to Canberrans are much closer to home. It is the footpath that makes it easier to get to the local shops, better lighting in a public space—the things people use every day.

That is why we have committed \$38.2 million over four years to active travel infrastructure, improving existing paths, filling missing links and upgrading lighting across our city. We are also making progress on major connections like the garden city cycleway. Construction of stage 1D is well underway and, once complete, stage 1 will provide a continuous connection from Ainslie through Braddon to the city, linking into the Bunda Street shared zone.

We are investing almost \$4 million in playground improvements across eight Canberra suburbs, including new playgrounds in Gilmore and Wanniasa, and upgrades in Amaroo, Bonython and other neighbourhoods. That is alongside important new facilities in Belconnen, including the all-abilities playground in Florey. That is something that I know Ms Berry is very keen to see, as well as looking forward to the new play facilities at Umbagog District Park and the enhancement of Margaret Timpson Park, with a new playground, public toilet, barbecue facilities and improved

accessibility.

Importantly, these are not priorities that have been determined in isolation. They have their origin in our regional plans. Of course, we also draw on our community consultation, infrastructure condition assessments and reports through Fix My Street to understand where improvements are needed and how they should be delivered to support people to move around, to keep public spaces accessible and to ensure our neighbourhoods work for the people who live in them.

MS BERRY: What progress is being made on upgrading Canberra's suburban shopping centres?

MS CHEYNE: I thank Ms Berry for the supplementary. We have committed more than \$18 million across the last two budgets to improving shopping centres throughout Canberra. That includes upgrades at Palmerston, Griffith, Mawson, Charnwood and Erindale. The next round covers Kingston, Kippax, Cooleman Court and Chisholm.

At Palmerston, designs have been completed and shared with the community, and they include improved paths and accessible parking, a new pram crossing, a new play space, picnic facilities and landscaping. At Griffith, the designs include accessibility improvements, repairs to paving and mosaics, new seating and improvements to the existing pergola. Construction at both centres is expected to commence in early 2027. We have also completed community consultation at Mawson, Charnwood and Erindale, and that feedback is helping to determine what happens next.

At Charnwood—and I think Ms Berry will be particularly pleased to hear this—we have heard residents make it clear that fixing the shopping centre car park is the first priority, so we are progressing that work, ahead of the broader precinct upgrades, with construction expected to commence later this year, and works planned for completion in 2027. Detailed design for the remaining improvements at Charnwood, alongside Mawson and Erindale, will continue throughout 2027.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Minister, how is community consultation helping to shape these shopping centre upgrades and ensure that they reflect the needs of local residents and businesses?

MS CHEYNE: I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for the question. We know that what works for one centre will not necessarily work for another. Our local shops, like their suburbs, have their own identities and idiosyncrasies. That is why we ask local residents and businesses about their priorities before finalising what improvements will be delivered. It is why we work with, and will continue working with, local traders and residents as designs are developed, because they are the people who understand how these spaces are used every single day.

We have seen some quite clear messages from our recent consultations. At Mawson and Erindale, pedestrian connections, lighting and general amenity have emerged as the most important priorities. At Charnwood, the decisive feedback about the car park is why we are bringing it forward, rather than delivering everything as one larger package. Rest assured that the other priorities that emerge—safety and lighting, and broader improvements to amenity and pedestrian connections—will still be progressed. It is not

simply about asking people what they think and then proceeding with what was already planned. It is about being prepared to adjust the priorities and the delivery program in response to what people tell us.

We will take that same approach with the next round of upgrades at Kingston, Kippax, Cooleman Court and Chisholm. Consultation on those shopping centre upgrades is expected to begin in early 2027.

Mr Barr: Further questions can be placed on the notice paper.

Supplementary answers to questions without notice **Corrections—restraint of detainees during childbirth and medical procedures**

MS TOUGH: I have some answers to Ms Vassarotti's questions earlier. Unfortunately I do not have the answers to Ms Clay's questions. I can say that the use of force and restraint policy states:

Officers must not use force, including chemical agents, against a pregnant detainee unless all other efforts have failed, and the detainee's behaviour presents a serious and imminent risk to the safety of a person or the security of the correctional centre.

The clinical care and treatment of pregnant women at the AMC is undertaken by CHS through the Justice Health Service, and services are also provided by Winnunga at the centre. If use of force happens to anyone in the AMC, under 9.2 the use of restraints when escorting a detainee is not considered a reportable use of force if the detainee does not resist, but 15.1 states:

Following any use of force, the following reports must be completed by the responsible officer according to the timeframe and the requirements of the Incident Reporting, Notifications and Debriefs Policy ...

Further, any decision to restrain a pregnant detainee requires approval from the Assistant Commissioner of Custodial Operations or above, so it is a fairly high-level decision. When a detainee advises ACT Corrective Services staff that they are pregnant but the pregnancy cannot be verified by ACT Health, officers are to proceed on the assumption that the detainee is pregnant and apply the relevant safeguards.

Access Canberra—Woden—relocation

MS CHEYNE: In response to a question I took on notice yesterday from Ms Carrick about the Woden Library tender, confidentiality deeds are standard practice, as I inferred but have now confirmed, on many government projects to mitigate security risks to the site, in terms of the potential for vandalism, acts of terrorism or other security risks. I was not specifically alerted to the fact that this would be applied to that tender, but, equally, that is not unusual.

ACT Public Service—misconduct

MR BARR: Regarding the answer to the question around leave of the former Head of

Service, I said “sick leave” and “personal leave”. I am advised that a combination of sick leave, annual leave and long service leave is the complete answer to that question.

Legislative Assembly—continuing resolution 7

MS CHEYNE: Mr Speaker, I have a matter that I would appreciate your consideration of and perhaps ruling on sometime next week. This week—particularly in question time, but we have also been drifting into this—there has been quite flagrant disregard of continuing resolution 7. I would appreciate a ruling on that resolution’s application and how compliance might be maintained in future proceedings. I appreciate you may need to reflect on this. I am happy to provide examples, but I think particularly about people who are named, or their position is named and you can clearly infer who is being spoken about. That they are repeatedly mentioned in questions under parliamentary privilege and do not have a right of reply is of concern. I would be grateful for your consideration and thought over the sitting period.

MR SPEAKER: Yes; I will look at that. It may be a matter that I refer to the Standing Committee on Administration and Procedures as well. Continuing resolution 7 is about the responsible exercise of free speech. It is a judgement call. There is a fine line between seeking information about important matters and also making sure that we exercise due caution. It often comes down to individual cases. I will look at it more broadly. It may be something we wrap into a review of standing orders.

Papers

Mr Speaker presented the following papers:

Auditor-General Act, pursuant to section 17—Auditor-General’s Report No 10/2026—Management of community facilities, dated 21 October 2026.

Continuing Resolution—

5AA—Commissioner for Standards—Annual Report 2025/2026, dated 9 July 2026.

6A—Ethics and Integrity Adviser for Members of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory—Report for the period 1 July 2025 to 30 June 2026, dated 2 July 2026.

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

Education Directorate Desktop Review of Tier 1 and 2 Education Capital Projects 2019-2026, dated October 2026.

Environment—bees and other pollinators

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS (Brindabella) (2.59): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) the vital role that bees and other pollinators play in supporting the ACT’s biodiversity, food production, ecosystem health and environmental

resilience;

- (b) that many native and introduced pollinator species face pressures from habitat loss, climate change, pests and diseases;
 - (c) the valuable contribution of Canberra’s beekeepers, community groups, schools and environmental organisations in supporting pollinator health and education;
 - (d) that at the 2024 election, ACT Labor committed to support pollinators by developing a community information and education program to help bees and pollinators thrive, including awareness-raising activities and planting guides to encourage pollinator-friendly gardens;
 - (e) that five local community gardens are being supported through the latest round of the Community Garden Grants Program, including Koala Playschool in Cook which will create a native, pollinator-friendly community garden and gathering space featuring plantings, seating and a street library; and
 - (f) the ongoing biosecurity risks posed by the Varroa mite and the importance of preparedness and monitoring measures to protect bee populations; and
- (2) calls on the Government to:
- (a) continue supporting local beekeepers in responding to the ongoing biosecurity risks associated with Varroa mite;
 - (b) identify opportunities to promote bee and pollinator-friendly plant species as part of ongoing work on environmental restoration;
 - (c) consider how bee and pollinator-friendly planting can be further supported through the review of the Municipal Infrastructure Standards (MIS);
 - (d) provide opportunities under the ACT Environment Grants Program to support projects that promote bee and pollinator-friendly activities;
 - (e) develop and publish practical guidance for households, schools, community groups and gardeners on actions they can take to support bees and other pollinators; and
 - (f) report to the Assembly on progress by the last sitting day in 2027.

“If the bee disappeared off the face of the earth, humans would only have four years left to live.” That is apparently a quote from a book titled *The Life of the Bee*, written in 1901 by the Belgian count Maurice Polydore Marie Bernard Maeterlinck. So humble is this book that, unlike your good self, Mr Assistant Speaker Cain, it does not yet have the online plinth of being the subject—the Assistant Speaker did not get the joke—of one of Wikipedia’s English articles. It is on Project Gutenberg. The line does not appear, but, for the sake of this motion’s narrative, let’s say that it is in the original. Unfortunately, Maeterlinck was not a scientist. He won the Nobel Prize in 1911 for literature, so whether his assessment I noted at the start should be believed is debateable. It does, however, give this discussion a good idea of the larger and potentially existential stakes this motion touches on.

There are many elements of the climate emergency and environmental change that, by dint of their size, their drivers and timeline, may feel difficult for a citizen to engage with, but the plight of pollinators is not. There are bees in the gardens outside this

chamber. There are some on my lavender bushes at home right now, and I think there are fewer of them than there were when we moved in five years ago.

When we think about environmental protection, our minds are often drawn to large landscapes, iconic species or major infrastructure projects, yet the reality is that healthy ecosystems depend on countless interactions occurring every day, often unnoticed. I think pollination is one of those. When we think about pollinators, we tend to think about bees—to “bee” specific, the European honey bee, brought to Australia on a sailing ship in 1822 to produce honey and wax for the colony.

Sue Monk Kidd, the American author of the *Secret Life of Bees*—which is not actually a book about bees—has suggested that it takes a bee 10 million trips to collect enough nectar to make one pound of honey. That is another writer’s big call, but, for the purpose of this debate, let’s say that it is also accurate. It puts into perspective honey bee pollination efforts, which are valued at around \$14.2 billion a year to Australian agriculture.

“Bee” that as it may, there are 1,700 native bee species in Australia, at least 24 of which are endemic to the ACT, including such beauties as the red-eyed resin bee, the harlequin bee, which is a masked bee, the common wasp-mimic, the green carpenter bee, the chequered cuckoo bee and the gold-tipped leafcutter. Although they are wild, do not sting and are generally solitary—no hive, no queen, no swarm and no honey—native bees are also important pollinators of native plants and domestic crops. Their contribution to the economy has never been formally counted, but their buzz pollination method—which European honey bees cannot do—is dependent on such varied crops as tomatoes, eggplants, blueberries, chillies and kiwifruit.

It is not just introduced and native bees that this motion recognises. There are many other pollinators that make extremely important contributions. Butterflies, moths, flies, beetles, birds and fruit bats, for instance, support the regeneration of native vegetation, the production of seeds and fruits, and the functioning of ecosystems that countless other species depend on. That is why, for a city like Canberra, where our urban landscape sits alongside nationally significant bushland, nature reserves and conservation areas, the health of pollinator populations matters enormously. Without pollinators, we would see cascading impacts throughout our environment. Those impacts would not be good.

Around the world, scientists, governments and environmental organisations have raised and are raising concerns about the impacts of habitat loss, climate change, pests, diseases and changing land-use practices on pollinator populations. These pressures are not distant or theoretical; they are issues that affect ecosystems here in Australia, including in the ACT, and they are pressures being felt in the garden just outside this room.

As our climate changes, flowering times may shift and weather patterns will become less predictable. Native vegetation becomes fragmented. Extreme weather events place additional stress on both pollinators and the plants they rely on. Protecting pollinators therefore requires a broad approach. It means creating and maintaining habitat, it means ensuring that flowering plants are available throughout the seasons, it means supporting biodiversity across urban and natural landscapes, and it means encouraging community

participation in stewardship and conservation. I think one of the very positive features of this issue is that members of the community in the ACT are already making significant contributions. Here I gladly applaud ACT for Bees and Other Pollinators, who are represented in the chamber today by treasurer, John Kenworthy.

Colleagues, ACT for Bees and Other Pollinators are a wonderful community organisation. Their website, to which I strongly recommend a visit, is an online hive of activity and unbelievable information. Did you know how important it is to put a stone in your birdbath so pollinators can reach a drink of water rather than drowning? I did not. We have a stone in our birdbath, but I think the Fadden kangaroo mob drink it dry every night, so it is a bit of a moot rock at the moment. But, even so, across our city are people like ACT for Bees dedicating countless hours to maintaining hives, sharing knowledge, educating young people and encouraging sustainable practices. These individuals and organisations often work quietly and without fanfare, yet their contribution is substantial. Their work reminds us that environmental protection is most effective when it is a shared endeavour between governments and communities.

I acknowledge this motion's two primary motivations: firstly, the foresighted commitment made by ACT Labor at the 2024 election to develop a community information and education program that helps bees and pollinators thrive through awareness raising and guidance on pollinator-friendly gardens; secondly, a helpful piece of correspondence I received from a constituent last week. She gave me eight issues in Tuggeranong to get on with, and item 3 was about bees. She said:

Plenty of Australian bees about down here on spring flowers. Hardly seen a European Honey Bee this Spring, however. Suspect varroa mite has decimated ACT hives? Ditto public education campaign on why bees are essential to human survival, as suggested for weeds. ACT for Bees has a good program but I suspect many people don't know about it.

Madam, I am on the case. My constituent made many good points in her email, and this was one of them: education is one of the most powerful tools available to us on this issue. Many people want to help biodiversity but are uncertain about where to start. Practical information can therefore make a significant difference. A resident choosing plants for a garden, a school planning a landscaping project, a community group revitalising a public space, or a household considering ways to support local wildlife can all benefit from clear and accessible guidance about choosing a diversity of flowering plants, incorporating native species, providing habitat, reducing unnecessary disturbance, and thinking about how private and public spaces contribute to broader ecological networks.

I note specifically the call for the ACT government to consider pollinator-friendly planting opportunities during its review of municipal infrastructure standards. To me, this looks like leaning into planting native shrubs, bushes and hardy flowers on road verges and between divided roads to give pollinators a feed—turning them into the pollinators' equivalent of a long paddock—and reduce the grass-mowing burden.

On a more social-good-focused note, last week I read an article from a respected news-gathering outlet suggesting that supporting pollinators delivers benefits that extend well beyond the environment. In Copenhagen, the urban beekeeping collective Bybi has built a thriving community around bees. It brings together volunteers, schools,

community organisations and local businesses in a shared effort to care for pollinators and produce honey. Bybi maintains colonies across schools, restaurants, conference centres, municipal buildings and commercial premises throughout Copenhagen. Their experience demonstrates that cities can play an important role in supporting pollinator populations when urban spaces are designed with biodiversity in mind. One particularly striking aspect of the project is that honey harvested from different parts of the city reflects the flowers that people have planted in those neighbourhoods. The taste, colour and character of the honey vary according to local vegetation and seasonal conditions.

I have a vision of taste-testing a Brindabella honey against honey from any other electorate. The Deputy Leader of the Opposition and I know which ones would be fine and which one would be wonderful. Combine the Tuggeranong and Lanyon Valleys—where you cannot see houses for the trees—with over 1,060 square kms of native nectar-filled Namadgi National Park and we cannot go wrong. It is a lovely vision, if I say so myself, and a powerful reminder that pollinators connect people to place. By planting diverse and pollinator-friendly species, Canberra residents can make a tangible contribution to biodiversity while fostering a deeper connection with the natural environment around them.

Although this motion is about supporting all pollinators, it would not be complete without noting the biosecurity challenges posed by the Varroa mite—in Latin, aptly, Varroa destructor. This motion recognises the importance of continuing support for local beekeepers as they navigate the risks and adapt to changing circumstances. The Varroa mite represents one of the most significant threats to managed honey bee populations. Its spread has required substantial effort from governments, industry groups and beekeepers across Australia. Varroa destructor was first identified in the ACT in April last year. In April this year, experts estimated that half of the ACT's 6,000 beehives had been impacted by Varroa mites. More than 1,000 have been destroyed, with their bees having fled or died. It is expected that Varroa destructor will be present in every ACT hive by the end of 2027.

There is hope. Bees are resilient. They will not be wiped out by the mite and, by the end of the decade, the remaining hives should have developed some resistance. But, if you grow fruit and vegetables in your backyard, you will likely see, or already have seen, a noticeable decline in the pollination of those plants. If you keep bees as a hobby, make sure you register with the ACT government as a beekeeper so that its bee people can contact you to offer support and tools to test your hives for Varroa and discuss management options, because ongoing monitoring, education, communication and cooperation with beekeepers are essential components of our response.

Supporting pollinators is not a matter of ideology; it is a matter of good environmental stewardship, informed by science, common sense and practical community engagement. None of the measures in this motion—which I trust the Assembly shall agree on—are radical; they are all positive: develop and distribute practical guidance for households, schools and community groups to support bees and other pollinators; continue helping local beekeepers to respond to the ongoing biosecurity risk proposed by the Varroa mite; identify opportunities for pollinator-friendly planting; and back-in pollinator-positive community projects. These measures build on work already underway in the ACT to strengthen community participation.

I think there is something profoundly symbolic about bees and pollinators. Their work is often invisible, they ask for little, and there are 10 million efforts for one pound of honey, yet the benefits they create extend far beyond themselves. They remind us that resilience is built through connections, that healthy communities depend on healthy ecosystems, and that small actions repeated many times can produce sweet results. If we want a city that is greener, more biodiverse and more resilient, then supporting pollinators is part of that mission. This motion provides an opportunity for the Assembly to affirm that commitment and to recognise the many Canberra residents already contributing to that goal. I commend it to the Assembly.

MS LEE (Kurrajong) (3.13): “According to all known laws of aviation, there is no way a bee should be able to fly. Its wings are too small to get its fat little body off the ground. The bee, of course, flies anyways because bees don’t care what humans think is possible.” These words—and I can see Mr Werner-Gibbings nodding—are, of course, the immortal opening lines of the *Bee Movie*. But they put into context just how extraordinary the bee and other pollinators really are.

I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for bringing his motion to the Assembly today and for speaking, despite all of the puns, with so much passion about this. Bees and other pollinators play a critical role in maintaining biodiversity. They help sustain the plants that provide food and shelter for insects, birds, mammals and reptiles. When pollinators thrive, plants reproduce, wildlife flourishes and ecosystems remain resilient. They also provide enormous economic benefits through agriculture. Many crops rely on pollination to maximise yield, quality and nutritional value. While honey bees are often the ones that receive the most attention, Australia is home to more than 1,700 species of native bees as well as many other native pollinators. The ACT itself is home to a remarkable diversity of native bees, many of which are important pollinators of native plants.

But, sadly, pollinators face increasing pressure from habitat loss, land clearing, pesticide use, climate change, invasive species and emerging biosecurity risks such as varroa mite. Certain pesticides can harm bees and other pollinators either directly or indirectly. These threats can weaken pollinator populations and undermine the resilience of ecosystems that depend on them. The varroa mite has been detected in beekeepers’ hives on several properties in the ACT. The parasite weakens honey bees by feeding on them and transmitting viruses, reducing hive health and survival. While native bees are not hosts of varroa mite themselves, any decline in managed honey bee populations can still have significant impacts on pollination services and agricultural production.

The ACT’s urban forests, nature reserves, grasslands, woodlands and gardens all depend on healthy pollinator populations, which is why protecting bees and other pollinators is not just about saving individual species; it is also about safeguarding the ecosystems. The Canberra Liberals will be supporting Mr Werner-Gibbings’ motion.

While I am on my feet, I will briefly address the Greens’ amendment—even though it has not been moved as yet—in anticipation, to confirm that the Canberra Liberals will also be supporting the amendment. These are important matters that should be considered as part of the finalisation of the Nature Conservation Strategy, whenever that may occur. However, as a number of stakeholders pointed out during the estimates

hearings, the government has failed to commit any funding in the recent budget to implement the measures in that strategy. The government can produce strategies, frameworks and action plans but, without funding, they remain little more than aspirations on paper. If the government is serious about improving nature conservation outcomes, it must explain how these measures will be delivered without any dedicated funding. Stakeholders are rightly asking whether this strategy will result in meaningful action or simply become another document that sits on a shelf. I commend and confirm that the Canberra Liberals will be supporting the motion and the amendment.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (3.17): I thank Mr Werner-Gibbins for bringing forward this motion today. I was not prepared with all the opening lines, but I found one listening to Ms Lee's speech:

There's a buzz buzz buzz in the meadow,
There's a buzz buzz buzz in the trees,
There's a buzz buzz buzz in the flowers,

These are the opening lines from *The Hive* kids TV show, which is about a family of bees. With that, I will be supporting this motion and supporting the amendments circulated by the Greens.

Pollinators, whether they are European bees, native bees, butterflies, moths, flies or birds play such a critical role in maintaining biodiversity, supporting food production and building resilient ecosystems everywhere, including here in the ACT. Without them, many of the plants that sustain our natural environment and our food system simply could not survive. This motion rightly acknowledges the massive challenges pollinators face. Habitat loss, climate change and biosecurity threats and pests are all very real and present threats to pollinators and therefore to our food security and natural environment.

The arrival of varroa mite in the ACT has demonstrated just how vulnerable pollinated populations, especially bees, can be, with significant impacts already being felt by local beekeepers, as Mr Werner-Gibbins remarked. Experts say half of the ACT's 6,000 beehives have already been impacted by the varroa mite and more than 1,000 have been destroyed. The Canberra Regional Beekeepers Association President, Mark Patterson, expects every hive in the ACT will have varroa mites within 18 months, which is reflective of this issue around the country. This is something we need to get a handle on quickly, while also looking at longer-term planning. This motion, I think, does a good job in putting forward several useful short-term measures to mitigate the impacts of varroa mite, while the hives can have the time and help from their beekeepers to develop a resistance to the mites over the next few years, which we know must be our primary immediate focus.

On this, I want to recognise the work already underway to this point. The government is committed to a community education and awareness program for pollinators, supports community gardens through grant funding and has incorporated pollinator-friendly planting principles into several resources and environmental programs across Canberra. These initiatives are worthwhile and needed. We also need, though, to question whether they match the scale of this issue, whether this motion matches the scale of this issue, and whether its calls are enough to provide resilience

for our pollinators in the long term.

If pollinators are as essential as we know they are, and as Mr Werner-Gibbings so eloquently explained, shouldn't we also be looking at the bigger picture here? This is a great opportunity to do that: stronger habitat restoration and conservation outcomes; better integration of pollinator corridors and pollinator-friendly planting into all of our urban planning policies and programs; understanding and mitigating the impacts of pesticide use on pollinators; making sure our policies are evidence-based and aligned with Australia's first national pollination strategy, which is under development; and taking a strong, territory-wide approach to pollinator conservation and resilience—an approach that acknowledges that many existing policies and strategies, as well as government programs, can be strengthened to make the ACT more pollinator-friendly. This includes our Urban Forest Strategy, our Biodiversity and Nature Conservation Strategy and programs, the forthcoming ACT Landscape Plan, our restoration and revegetation programs, our planning strategy, as well as, of course, the municipal infrastructure standards mentioned in the motion.

As a recent micro-example of my point here, at the end of August, the government announced that 140 new trees would be planted alongside the light rail stage 2A extension from Alinga Street to Commonwealth Park—an important planting around a key infrastructure project, trees that will be at the heart of our city for generations to come. In the media release accompanying this announcement, it said that planting supported the targets outlined in the Urban Forest Strategy relating to canopy cover. But, if you look into the species of those 140 trees, only 21 are native and the other 85 per cent are invasive—and, in relation to this motion, are really not all that beneficial to pollinators, compared to what other native species might have delivered. Why is that? When this decision was made, why did it land on a species list where the vast majority of this government-funded planting was decided to be non-native and certainly not as pollinator-friendly as they could have been? This kind of decision feels like such an easy fix, and a small example of why we need a holistic look at this issue—and it is why I am glad the motion is before us today.

We know that protecting pollinators cannot be separated from these broader biodiversity, conservation, planning, and agricultural policies, and I think the original motion, as great as it is, could reflect that to a greater extent. The measures in here are important, but they alone will not reverse habitat loss or build the landscape-scale resilience that these species need. It is worth noting that these are species that we fundamentally need to survive as well, as Mr Werner-Gibbings remarked. So I am supportive of this motion and the positive actions it contains. I am also keen to see the government treat this as a starting point rather than an end point, in terms of territory-wide pollinator conservation and resilience. That is why I support and welcome the amendments put forward by the Greens, which I imagine Ms Clay will be speaking to next, adding a more holistic lens to the motion, particularly through the added call to examine pollination through two very important plans coming our way, in the ACT Landscape Plan and Nature Conservation Strategy. I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for bringing this motion forward today and Ms Clay for working out sensible amendments, which I am very happy to support as well.

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (3.22): The Greens are happy to support this motion, but we feel that it could be stronger. I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for bringing forward this

motion today. This is a really useful contribution. I also want to acknowledge the contributions from Ms Lee and Mr Emerson, particularly their bee quotes—and I raise them a bee cardigan in response. I am moving some amendments, at the request of ACT for Bees, who have long advocated for the ACT government to become a bee and pollinator-friendly territory. I seek leave to move my amendments together.

Leave granted.

MS CLAY: I move:

1. After all text in paragraph (1)(f), insert:

“(g) the importance of considering the city as a whole and planting for biodiversity and complex ecosystems so that bees and pollinators have food year-round to ensure their survival and ours;”.

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

“(f) consider how landscape planning, urban development and environmental restoration activities under the ACT Landscape Plan and final Nature Conservation Strategy can support habitat connectivity and incorporate bee and pollinator-friendly plant species, including opportunities to provide year-round pollinator food.”.

Pollinators in the ACT include native bees, honey bees, butterflies, moths, flies, beetles, wasps and birds. It is not hyperbole to say that healthy pollinator populations are essential for our survival. Pollinators are underpinned biodiversity, healthy ecosystems, climate resilience and food production. And it is not just an environmental issue; it is a fundamental ecological service that supports our food security and our resilient food systems. Many of the fruits, vegetables, nuts and seeds that we rely on, along with crops used to feed livestock, depend on animal pollination. I think Mr Werner-Gibbings really laid that out well in his opening speech.

But Australia’s pollinators are increasingly under pressure. Varroa mite is the most immediate threat to pollination security. The arrival and spread of varroa mite represents the most significant current threat to Australia’s agricultural pollination system. Varroa increases management costs, reduces hive productivity and contributes to the decline of both managed and feral honey bee populations. The arrival of varroa mite has led to the collapse of hives and bee colonies across affected regions. But the impact extends far beyond the loss of the bees themselves. Many of our beekeepers are leaving the industry because the cost and effort required to rebuild after losing hives is so overwhelming. According to the Australian Honey Bee Industry Council, an estimated one in four beekeepers left the industry after varroa hit in 2022. Those who remain are under other pressures, including soaring fuel prices, rising chemical resistance and climate-related disasters.

According to ACT for Bees, since it was first detected in the ACT in 2025, varroa has spread rapidly, more than 1,000 hives have already been lost and around half of the 6,000 hives in the ACT have been impacted. Growers and gardeners in Canberra have noticed a really marked decline in the number of bees around. I have noticed this in my own garden and I think many of us have. Varroa mite also seems to be pesticide

resistant. In April this year it was reported in the media that resistance to major varroa mite chemicals was found in Queensland and New South Wales. The Australian Honey Bee Industry Council said it will potentially lead to a new population of mites, and beekeepers may be forced to manage these mites with a significantly reduced toolbox.

Varroa is only one part of the story. Across the world, pollinator populations are declining due to habitat loss, fragmentation, pesticide use, invasive species, disease and climate change. The challenges are complex but they are not insurmountable, and there is a lot that we can do to help our pollinators survive and thrive. We need to do what we can to support those pollinators, not just the honey bees but also the native bees, the butterflies, the hoverflies, the insects, to ensure their survival and to ensure our continued survival.

A bee and pollinator-friendly ACT is about more than individual gardens and individual community groups. It is about creating whole landscapes, policies and practices that support pollinators across our suburbs, parks, reserves, farms, schools, workplaces and public spaces. The ACT is uniquely placed to lead in this area. We have really strong environmental programs, we have active community groups, we have great citizen science initiatives, research expertise and growing recognition of the importance of biodiversity in our urban planning. That is why pollination has to be considered in the decisions that are shaping our city, and that is why I moved these amendments. We need pollinators to be factored into major planning frameworks, including our ACT government landscape plan that is currently being developed by the Government Landscape Architect, and including the final version of our Nature Conservation Network. The Greens want to see pollinator-friendly principles fully embedded into ACT planning and landscape guidelines and we want to see pollinator-friendly planting encouraged in parks, streetscapes, verges and public spaces.

Ginninderry's pollinator corridor project is a really good demonstration of what is possible with a bit of thought. They have adopted a 200 by 200 metre grid designed to ensure there is a variety of planting within the grid that can be comfortably accessed by bees when they are flying. Ginninderry have built native bee hotels and they have planted specific varieties of plants—both natives and exotics, trees and shrubs—that ensure pollinators get what they need all year round. The lesson there is simple: creating a pollinator-friendly landscape does not necessarily cost significantly more but it does require intelligent and thoughtful design at the outset. The benefits are enormous. Intentionally creating and introducing biodiversity into our local landscape means better climate adaptation, more personal amenity and a better environment for people as well as for the pollinators.

We cannot have the pollinators as an afterthought; we need government to actively think about how to increase biodiversity and create bee and pollinator-friendly vegetation right across the city, so that we have corridors and connections between the pockets of vegetation for the pollinators to travel along. We have the opportunity here to demonstrate how government, the community organisations, researchers, educators, industry, residents and planners can work together to create this. The amendments that I have moved are about making sure that pollinator protection is reflected, not only in our aspirations but also in the solid plans and policies and design decisions that we are making at the moment that will shape our city.

A bee and pollinator-friendly ACT is about more than individual gardens; it is about that entire vision for Canberra, the entire landscape plan and the entirety of our nature conservation framework, and it is about making sure that we have embedded that in the ground, in those really, really key planning and environmental decisions. We have so much of that work going on at the moment, so we need to include that too. I commend the amendments.

MS ORR (Yerrabi—Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water, Minister for Disability, Autism and Neurodiversity, Minister for Housing and Homelessness, and Minister for Equality) (3.29): I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for bringing this motion to the Assembly today. Unlike everyone else, I am not even going to attempt the puns, because I think they have all been used and I will just embarrass myself.

I think we have heard everyone in here enthusiastically point out their love for bees and other pollinators and the important role that they play within our community. We all know that they have a critical role in maintaining healthy ecosystems, supporting our biodiversity, contributing to food production and strengthening the resilience of our natural environment. The government is committed to making sure that we respond to climate change. As our city grows, protecting pollinators will be both an environmental and a community priority, and we recognise the important contribution made by community organisations, schools, volunteers, beekeepers and everyone else across our city, who work every day to support pollinator health. I also acknowledge ACT for Bees, who are here today, and the great work that they have done over a number of years, including all the years I have been in this Assembly, in advocating for bees and pollinators to be considered in all government work that affects them. The government will continue to support pollinators through a range of different measures, and I think the motion that Mr Werner-Gibbings has brought forward today really highlights some of those key areas where we can continue to build on the work that is there in how we support pollinators within the ACT.

I will go to a couple of the points have come up around the varroa mite and the biosecurity risk that is there. We know that 95 per cent of the ACT's beekeepers are hobbyists and many are facing the challenge of managing varroa mite for the first time. Through ACT Biosecurity, we continue to work closely with our beekeepers, ensuring they have access to the information, training and support that they need to build their capacity and resilience. We have registration under the biosecurity regulation so that we have direct communication channels and we can make sure that everyone is getting the information, and we know where to get that information to. We do a lot of work with the Biosecurity team. Our officers regularly engage with the Canberra Region Beekeepers Association to share advice. Officers have also contributed to community education, such as the Community Education Day at Tidbinbilla with ACT for Bees, and helping children and parents learn about bees and other pollinators. We have a lot of information on our website. We have also established the Sentinel Private Training Facility at Pialligo to strengthen our surveillance and early detection capability while providing practical training opportunities for our beekeepers. We will continue to work with local beekeepers, industry groups and community groups to ensure the ACT remains prepared for biosecurity threats, including varroa, and keeping our beekeeping sector strong and sustainable.

On the second point, calling on the ACT government to identify opportunities to promote bee- and pollinator-friendly plant species, we have had quite a bit of discussion on this. We remain committed to looking through a range of government initiatives as to where we can include bee- and pollinator-friendly species, and we will continue to explore and find new opportunities for those too. That goes to the municipal infrastructure standards as well, which we are currently reviewing, and looking at what plants we can use within an urban landscape and projects and how we can meet not just the need for pollinators and bees but also other parts—like tree canopy for shade in a changing climate and having that diversity within our urban realm that is just nice to look at. I put in a constant request to the minister for city services to also consider that a lot of people allergies from all these plants and how we can minimise that.

The next part here goes to the environment grants. I think this is actually a really good opportunity. We have started doing it and we have seen a bit of enthusiasm through our community-led environmental initiatives, where we have the grants there for our community groups to do a lot of projects. We did recently—as it notes in the motion—expand the community gardens grants to include bee- and pollinator-focused projects. In this most recent round we had the Koala early childhood school come forward with a proposal to develop a pollinator-friendly garden for all the kids at the centre. I think this is one of the exciting ways where we can see simple, well-informed interventions actually start to create a lot more of an understanding about what can be done to increase bee and pollinator gardens and vegetation across the city. I have already let the Koala school know that I am quite keen to come and see their garden when it is done and play with the kids, because I think it sounds pretty neat, to be honest. So I am more than happy to have a look at other ways that we can continue through our environmental grants to find opportunities to support and encourage pollinator-focused projects.

Moving to the guidance, which is the last part here, we are in the process of developing up guidance. I would like to thank ACT for Bees and other community groups for their input over many years on how we can start to really bring together those educational materials and programs to help the community understand the importance of pollinators and the practical actions that they can take. That could be, as a number of people have already mentioned, promoting pollinator-friendly plant species, encouraging habitat creation, looking at restoration activities and even signage that explains, “This is what this is doing,” and working with our community groups and land managers to build it into business-as-usual practices for them.

I am more than happy to take Ms Clay’s amendments on board. I recently had a meeting with the ACT Government Landscape Architect and ACT for Bees to start talking about how we can connect up their great advocacy and passion with the Landscape Plan and the work that we are doing there, particularly within the urban footprint and how we might look within the city to have more pollinator-friendly opportunities. Within our conservation areas, I think we need to manage the good intent with where we might create a biosecurity risk, but that is one that we will continue to work on through the Office of Nature Conservation and through the Parks and Conservation Service to make sure that we are getting the balance right as we strive towards having a really pollinator-friendly conservation network.

I would like to very briefly address Ms Lee’s comments on funding of the Nature Conservation Strategy. That conservation strategy is still being finalised. We have the

final going through our cabinet processes currently and, once released, we will continue to implement that over a 10-year period. As I believe I have put on the record, we do have a lot of funding that is going towards the activities that are flagged in that strategy, including building the Nature Conservation Network and increasing our biosecurity functions. I could rattle off a whole heap more, but I might come back at another time because I have only a few minutes left. In realising those, while they might not be under a heading in the budget that says “Nature Conservation Strategy”—which is not currently formally finalised—they definitely work towards the intent and the actions behind it. The ACT government will continue to build on that over the course of a 10-year period, looking at the need that we have there and where we need to be putting in place additional funding or where we need to be focusing the efforts that we have in our business-as-usual practices towards the outcomes that we strive for.

So I will leave my comments there. I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings. I have a feeling, given how many puns he put in his speech, that we have probably unleashed within this place a bit of a new enthusiast for bees. I look forward to continuing to work with him and everyone in the Assembly and in our community as we keep progressing the great work that is going on and probably amplify it a little bit, based on the enthusiasm that everyone has here.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS (Brindabella) (3.38), in reply: I thank colleagues for their contributions to this debate and for the broad support shown for the intent of this motion. I especially thank Minister Orr for her insight, guidance and advice as I was ripping this one up; Ms Clay for her thoughtful and helpful amendments which strengthen the motion; Mr Emerson, who is not here, for bringing some sorely-needed poetry into the *Hansard*, which is important; Ms Lee, who laughed at my puns, regardless of whether that was more in sympathy than amusement; and ACT for Bees and Other Pollinators for being here today. I thank them very much.

Today’s discussion reinforces an important point: supporting bees and other pollinators sits at the intersection of biodiversity, food production, environmental resilience, community participation, and education. Collectively, we are recognising the essential role that pollinators play in maintaining healthy ecosystems—our healthy ecosystem in the ACT. Many species of pollinators are facing pressures from habitat loss, climate change, pests and disease. Also, we recognise the dedication, commitment and enthusiasm of local beekeepers, community groups and environmental organisations who are already making a positive contribution across the ACT.

This motion identifies the challenges, and we are agreeing on practical steps in response to those challenges. They are sensible, achievable and community focused, as I mentioned at the start. They develop and distribute to households, schools and community groups practical guidance to support bees and other pollinators; continue to help local beekeepers respond to the ongoing biosecurity risk posed by Varroa mite; identify opportunities for pollinator-friendly planting; and back in pollinator-positive community projects. And there is a commitment to report back to the Assembly on progress.

The motion recognises the critical role pollinators like bees, butterflies and beetles play in supporting the ACT’s biodiversity, food production, health and resilience. The measures recognise that governments have a role to play, and they emphasise that

meaningful environmental outcomes are achieved when communities are encouraged and empowered to participate—they are part of the mission. Our parks, nature streets, public gardens, school grounds and even private backyards can all contribute to creating a pollinator-friendly city. Every flowering garden and every habitat corridor make a difference. Environmental stewardship is often portrayed as something that happens only through major policies or large-scale projects—and these things certainly matter—but stewardship also happens in backyards, school grounds, community gardens and public spaces. It happens when people understand that the choices they make can contribute to healthier and more resilient ecosystems.

The education part of this motion—helping people understand the importance of pollinators—creates benefits that extend well beyond a single program or project. In general, knowledge encourages participation, and participation strengthens environmental outcomes. Bees and pollinators may be small, but their importance is immense. Their work supports the natural systems that sustain biodiversity and enrich our quality of life. Here, by supporting practical measures that will help pollinators survive, and ideally thrive, we are working to create a healthier and more resilient future for our city.

I was going to close the debate with another overworked pun, but, instead, I will recite a quatrain from the early 18th century English minister, hymn-writer and logician, Isaac Watts. It states:

How doth the little busy bee
Improve each shining hour,
And gather honey all the day
From every opening flower!

I again thank members for their contributions and support, and once again commend the motion to the Assembly.

Amendments agreed to.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Smart glasses—prohibition of use in government workplaces

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (3.43): Together with Ms Barry, I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) camera and Artificial Intelligence (AI) enabled smart glasses and other wearable devices capable of discreetly recording or livestreaming audio, images and video are becoming increasingly accessible;
- (b) the eSafety Commissioner has identified risks including covert recording, image-based abuse and cyber abuse, while smart glasses can also provide important disability, accessibility and assistive-technology benefits;
- (c) governments across Australia are responding to these emerging risks,

including:

- (i) the Commonwealth seeking advice on their use in Australian Public Service workplaces;
- (ii) Western Australia prohibiting smart glasses in public schools from 12 October 2026, subject to medical, accessibility, assistive-technology and educational exemptions;
- (iii) Victoria extending student personal-device restrictions to wearable technology from 28 January 2027;
- (iv) South Australia reviewing the adequacy of its laws and raising nationally consistent regulation; and
- (v) local governments introducing or considering restrictions in sensitive facilities including pools, change rooms, libraries, childcare and community facilities;
- (d) the *Listening Devices Act 1992*, while amended since its enactment, has an underlying framework that predates smartphones, social media, livestreaming, contemporary wearable cameras and AI, and unlike legislation in a number of other Australian jurisdictions, does not provide a comprehensive framework regulating optical surveillance devices; and
- (e) section 12 of the *Human Rights Act 2004* protects against unlawful or arbitrary interference with privacy;
- (2) further notes that any ACT response should:
 - (a) be proportionate and focused on inappropriate conduct and environments presenting heightened privacy, safety or security risks, rather than imposing an indiscriminate prohibition on wearable technology; and
 - (b) protect legitimate disability, accessibility, medical, assistive-technology and educational uses; and

Technology is changing how we see the world. There are many examples—and I believe this is one of them—where technology moves at such a pace that policymakers and lawmakers take some time to catch up with those changes. We are seeing this example play out right now. Smart glasses, as members would be aware, and other wearable devices can discreetly record or livestream audio and video. The person who is being photographed or videoed may have no idea that their conversation or their image is being captured. For example, Canberrans should be able to take their children to the pool, attend a government service centre or go to work with confidence that their privacy will be respected. Buying a pair of smart glasses does not buy the user the right to someone else's privacy. Schools, change rooms and early childhood settings demand particular care. Staff in those places need clear rules that they can explain and apply, and families in particular deserve to know what protections are in place for them and their children.

Together with my colleague the shadow attorney-general Chiaka Barry, I am calling for restrictions on the use of recording-enabled smart glasses and other wearable recording devices in ACT workplaces and sensitive facilities like pools. These restrictions must include clear exemptions for legitimate disability, accessibility, medical, assistive technology and educational uses. Those exemptions are central to this motion. As shadow minister for disability, I recognise the independence this technology can offer.

Smart glasses can help someone understand their surroundings, access information and participate more fully in daily life, and these benefits should be protected.

My office has received considerable supportive correspondence, with many people offering practical advice on a way forward. I particularly thank Guide Dogs NSW/ACT for highlighting how essential smart glasses can be for people who are blind or have low vision. Their contribution reinforces why we must develop these safeguards alongside the people who really rely on this technology, while, most importantly and significantly, protecting the privacy of those who may be unaware of their image being captured. The task is to establish sensible boundaries that preserve legitimate uses while addressing heightened privacy, safety and security risks. That requires clear guidance for users, staff and the wider community. The government should explain how restrictions will operate, how exemptions will be managed, and how staff will be supported to apply them fairly. The policy must work at a school gate, a pool entrance and a service counter.

Other governments and jurisdictions have already introduced restrictions or have started formal reviews. There are practical models the ACT can draw on, including clear protections for people who rely on assistive technology. Western Australia has banned smart glasses in public schools, with exemptions for medical, accessibility, assistive technology and approved educational uses. Victoria has announced wearable-device restrictions for students, commencing on 28 January next year. The commonwealth is reviewing smart glasses in public service workplaces, including possible prohibitions and exemptions. South Australia is reviewing whether existing laws adequately address smart glasses and is seeking national consistency.

The Canterbury-Bankstown Council has banned smart glasses in council leisure and aquatic centres. The Brisbane City Council has prohibited non-consensual recording using camera-enabled devices, including smart glasses, across its 21 public pools. The City of Sydney is currently reviewing entry conditions for smart glasses across leisure centres, libraries, and childcare and community centres. Yarra City Council is already investigating smart glasses restrictions in sensitive council facilities. The City of Adelaide is reviewing smart glasses use and potential misuse at council-controlled locations. And very recently the Queanbeyan-Palerang Regional Council banned these glasses in aquatic centres to prevent discreet recording, and that will be monitored through entry conditions imposed.

Other jurisdictions are already making this work happen through school policies and conditions of entry, with clear rules and practical steps for staff to address breaches. The ACT has plenty of models to draw on. Our safeguards must include clear and workable disability exemptions that have been developed with organisations such as Guide Dogs NSW/ACT so we protect privacy while preserving access to technology that people rely on for independence.

As you can see, other jurisdictions have moved quickly, and the motion that Ms Barry and I are presenting asks the government to move very quickly. It has been encouraging to hear some indications in public media and in communications from the Chief Minister's office to mine. Also, I believe there have been supportive statements from the Greens. I look forward to those playing out according to my current understanding. That is a good sign. It is above politics. It is about our community. It is about protecting

our community and their privacy—making sure our community feel that they can go to a public place, like a pool or a workplace or an Access Canberra centre, without feeling it is a risky place to go. It is very pleasing to get those indications, and I suspect that will be the way this plays out this afternoon.

The motion from Ms Barry and I asks the government to report to the Assembly by the first sitting week of next year, and to give a clear deadline and allow the Assembly to assess an appropriate response. It is perhaps even within the realms of possibility that we will have legislation presented to us by that timeframe. I look forward to the government's response and to other members addressing this issue.

MS BARRY (Ginninderra) (3.51): I too rise to speak to this motion which is co-sponsored by Mr Cain and me. I also thank all of the members in this place who have engaged in conversations with me and my office. This motion comes at a time when the use of smart glasses is increasing and artificial intelligence technology is rapidly evolving. Mr Cain highlighted all of that in his speech. But it also comes at a time when we must protect people's privacy and reduce the risk of these technologies being used to facilitate unlawful activities.

The lack of regulation surrounding this technology in the ACT is concerning, particularly when so many other jurisdictions and even local councils have started to respond. Mr Cain also covered some of those jurisdictions and their responses or anticipated responses. I appreciate that the government have now indicated that they will be doing some work, and that is quite welcomed, but it is just the start. Most other governments have moved on this quicker than we have.

We have an outdated legislative framework which has not been amended recently to reflect the significant evolution of technology, and we currently have nothing regulating AI. This raises considerable legal concerns. Yet again, it reveals a pattern whereby Canberra is becoming a den for criminals and thugs to fly under the radar, engage in disturbing activities and put public safety at risk. We know that smart glasses have been used in disturbing and covert ways and for unlawful behaviour to go unseen, and we cannot continue to leave a regulatory black hole that allows this risk to continue and only get worse.

Technology-related regulation is something that must happen frequently and it must happen quickly. As we have indicated, the development of technology is fast and evolving, and we need to match the change and the pace to ensure that we are proactively pre-empting risk rather than taking a reactionary approach once the risk already exists. This joint motion calls for a vital and pragmatic response by the government to introduce a regulatory framework around the use of these glasses in the ACT specifically. It calls for commonsense rules to prohibit the use of smart glasses in ACT workplaces and sensitive facilities, like schools, swimming pools, change rooms, toilets, childcare centres, and Access Canberra or other government service centres.

The reasons for this do not need much explanation. It is clear that using a recording device built into optical glasses presents serious concerns around safety, security and privacy for vulnerable Canberrans, specifically children. It allows for predatory behaviour to go unseen and it makes it very difficult to detect when criminals with harmful and sick intentions are recording people. This motion is simple: it is about

addressing a public safety issue that many other jurisdictions have already addressed. It is about making it clear that we will not turn a blind eye to potential bad actors disguised as using a prescription from an optometrist.

This motion recognises that there are legitimate uses and genuine needs that must be protected. We know that smart glasses can be used in positive ways to enhance accessibility for people. Mr Cain and I have received correspondence from Guide Dogs Australia and Guide Dogs NSW/ACT outlining how smart glasses are essential assistive technology for many people who are blind or have low vision. They support independence and help with daily tasks like communication and navigation. This motion is not about targeting them; it is about putting in place guardrails to prevent misuse, not legitimate use. It is about creating targeted safeguards to ensure that the technology is used as intended. It is not about banning the technology outright but ensuring that it is not used for sinister purposes. Whereas other cameras or recording devices like mobile phones are easily identifiable in public spaces, it recognises that it is not easy to detect whether smart glasses are recording. We have an obligation to protect the privacy of individuals—that is a human right we are protecting—and protect our kids from unlawful and arbitrary interference with their privacy.

Finally, I thank Mr Cain, as shadow minister for the public service, for moving this motion and for all of the work he has done. It is important to recognise that we need these guardrails to safeguard the vulnerable in our community. I commend the motion 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) (3.57): I thank Mr Cain and Ms Barry for bringing this motion forward. It is appropriate to acknowledge that the motion is factual and succinct. It does not seek to score cheap political points, and therefore no amendment is being proposed, and it might get through unanimously. Let that be an advisory tale to all of us at the end of a somewhat heated and contested week in territory politics. We will come together and find common ground on this issue. I genuinely acknowledge that the way the motion has been framed allows other parties to engage constructively with it, and that is good, so thank you.

In the territory, we already have a range of laws governing privacy, surveillance and recording, but, as has been identified in both Mr Cain's and Ms Barry's contributions, as technology has become more sophisticated, it is certainly appropriate that we consider whether those existing laws and protections remain fit for purpose. The government is indeed increasingly concerned about the privacy and safety implications of smart glasses and other wearable technologies, particularly their ability to record, monitor or identify people without their knowledge or consent. As we have heard, whilst the technologies can provide benefits, particularly for accessibility—and I have received the same correspondence as I think all members have in this regard—they raise important questions about privacy, child safety and the appropriate use of personal information.

The government believes Canberrans should be able to go about their daily lives with confidence that their privacy is appropriately protected. We have requested urgent advice on the use of these devices in government-owned facilities, including schools

and public pools, but also more broadly. We expect that advice imminently, and we will take appropriate action, including the banning of these devices where appropriate. The existing privacy, surveillance and recording laws provide important protections for the community, and, as part of the work the government has commissioned, we will consider whether those frameworks remain fit for purpose. Compliance with existing laws and any applicable existing restrictions is of course expected. Those protections exist now, but, where gaps are identified, the government will consider further legislative, regulatory or enforcement measures that are required to ensure that appropriate protections are in place. We continue to support innovation and the responsible adoption of emerging technologies, but not at the expense of community expectations around privacy, safety and accountability.

In closing, I make this one observation: governments and individuals obviously have responsibilities—governments around regulating the environment, and individuals around their own personal use of these technologies—but let's be clear that technology companies have an obligation to design products that, in fact, protect people's privacy and safety from the outset rather than treating those protections as an afterthought and responding to understandable government regulation and community concern. In saying all of that, I thank Mr Cain and Ms Barry for bringing the motion forward. We are happy to support the motion. The work is already underway.

MS VASSAROTTI (Kurrajong) (4.01): First of all, I would like to thank Mr Cain and Ms Barry for bringing this motion about smart glasses and wearable recording devices to the chamber. I think it is a timely motion on an important issue. I thank the members for doing a thoughtful job in drafting this motion and capturing the complexities of this issue in a really succinct way, as the Chief Minister noted. And I am so glad that we can agree. This motion is, essentially, an implementation of Greens policy.

We are in an age of rapidly expanding technology. Artificial intelligence, miniaturisation, web connectivity and the exponential increase in processing power are allowing the creation of devices that are challenging our privacy laws. They are challenging our expectations of how we are treated when we are in public spaces. They are even challenging our sense of safety. Our laws and regulations must be responsive.

Our main privacy laws were written decades before this technology even existed, and big tech is exploiting the gap. Technology should serve people, not the other way around. But with these powerful and AI-supported technologies, we are starting to lose control over the impacts. The smart glasses that we are discussing do not just record vision and sound; they record and they also bring in AI. This means they can do things like identify individuals, infer characteristics, track movements and create detailed profiles. Obviously, this creates a range of serious civil liberties concerns.

The Greens have consistently opposed and raised concerns about the unchecked expansion of facial recognition and mass surveillance technologies. There are also issues with these devices potentially being misused for harassment, stalking, intimidation and the collection of non-consensual images and footage.

Canberrans expect that when they visit a pool or a gym, catch a bus, visit a shop or attend a community event, they are not being secretly recorded or analysed by strangers. People should not have to wonder whether someone that is looking at them is actually

filming them. I understand that some of the glasses show a recording light when they are recording, but not every model does this. This is a particular issue for women and girls, who we know have particular concerns about covert recording and image-based abuse. That is because they have been regularly exposed to this crime.

We have had some discussion already this week about the level of sexual assault and harassment faced by women, and about the prevalent and dangerous attitudes that underpin this. It is not uncommon at all to read about prosecutions of men who have planted surveillance devices to record women in secret. The fact is that technology that enables surveillance without consent risks undermining people's sense of safety in public spaces.

There is a further question when it comes to these recording devices. It is not only about what these devices can see; it is about what happens afterwards to all the data that they collect. These kinds of devices can collect far more than a wearer realises. Metadata such as location, time, movement patterns and social interactions can also be captured, alongside images and audio. These can be used to create detailed behavioural profiles. We know that large companies are increasingly doing just this kind of thing—aggregating data for profiling or other uses. Gambling and alcohol companies have been exposed extensively for collecting data in order to target users, who are often people who are underage or vulnerable to harm. I do not think Canberrans want to become unpaid contributors to commercial AI systems simply because they happen to walk past someone who is wearing smart glasses.

Just as an aside, I am not sure whether members of the Assembly have heard about the way that data collected from the popular Pokémon Go game was used. Pokémon Go is a very popular mobile game where players use their phone to find and catch virtual Pokémon that appear in real-world locations through augmented reality. What has been found is that Pokémon Go data trained AI that could be used to assist military drones in war zones. The location scans and related data were used by the developer Niantic to develop what they call a “large geospatial model”. That is used to help AI understand and navigate physical spaces.

Just in the last year, Niantic Spatial has partnered with Vantor, which is a company working on spatial detection and navigation software for drones, including in some military applications. You can read about this in the *Guardian*. The reporting explains that the historical scans from Pokémon Go can be used to assist military drones in navigating when GPS is unavailable. Essentially, millions of people thought they were simply playing a game, but years later this data is being used to build geospatial AI with applications far beyond entertainment, including potential military uses. It is a reminder of how data that technology companies are collecting today can be used in the future in ways that we cannot predict.

Digital Rights Watch has said that the use of civilian data for military ends is troubling. Dr Rob Nicholls, from Sydney's Centre for AI, Trust and Governance, said that this Pokémon Go case was likely to be the tip of the iceberg regarding collected data being used for other purposes.

In conclusion, I emphasise that the Greens believe innovation must be matched by strong protections for privacy, consent and human rights. As smart glasses and wearable

AI become more common, the ACT needs to respond and, ideally, lead. We have an opportunity to put people, not surveillance, at the centre of technological change.

We are strongly supportive of the government taking action to ensure that existing offences are effective in protecting the community from this evolving technology. The motion moved by Mr Cain and Ms Barry lists a range of steps that are already being taken in other jurisdictions. An obvious first step, as the motion requests, is to prohibit the use of these devices in ACT government workplaces and sensitive facilities, including public schools, swimming pools, change rooms and early childhood settings. At the same time we need to ensure that there are exceptions for legitimate disability, accessibility, medical, assistive technology and educational uses.

These are issues that I have also already raised with the Attorney-General, and we have had some discussions. Work has already begun in JACS to develop some appropriate legislative responses. I look forward to seeing the government bring forward appropriate laws or regulations in this space as soon as possible. Once again, I thank Mr Cain and Ms Barry for this important motion.

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) (4.09): Technology is front of mind across my portfolio responsibilities, whether it is using AI across our public service, the use of technology and screens from preschool to college, or the importance of cybersecurity, about which I updated members this morning.

The ACT government is taking action on the privacy and safety issues associated with smart glasses and other emerging wearable technologies, particularly their capacity to record images and conversations without others necessarily being aware. The government recognises that these technologies have legitimate and potentially valuable uses, including improving accessibility for people with disability. We also recognise that any restrictions need to balance the vital privacy, safety and security considerations with accessibility inclusion and the benefits that the technology may offer.

This is a complex issue that extends well beyond technology policy. Smart glasses raise questions across privacy and surveillance, protective security, workplace safety, child safety, schools, health and community settings, disability and accessibility, human rights, records and information management, consumer protection, and the management of public facilities.

The ACT public service is already working across directorates to better understand the risks, the existing protections and the potential policy options. This work includes the consideration of community use and public facilities, such as schools and libraries, as well as ACT government workplaces, drawing on relevant policy, justice, digital security and service delivery perspectives.

Existing ACT privacy, surveillance and recording laws, together with rules applying in government workplaces and facilities, provide an important starting point. Additional options could range from guidance to place-based controls, restrictions on particular functions, or approval arrangements being required in particular circumstances.

In the education portfolio, the government has existing policies that apply to the use of smart glasses in many settings administered by the Education Directorate. The directorate's Personal Use of Communication Devices in ACT Public Schools Policy defines a personal communication device as any electronic device capable of connecting to an external network, explicitly including handheld and wearable devices. Students in years P-10 are prohibited from accessing personal communication devices during class, breaks and school activities, unless an explicit exemption applies. Smart glasses already fall under this restriction.

The policy forbids students from using any personal device to record or photograph peers, staff or visitors without explicit permission. Students who do not abide by this policy will be responded to in accordance with their school's behaviour management policies and procedures. Implementation procedures on personal use of communication devices in ACT public schools have been developed to support schools to implement this policy. Serious issues relating to the illegal and/or inappropriate use of personal communication devices will be referred to the ACT police or the relevant authority.

In addition to the directorate's Personal Use of Communication Devices in ACT Public Schools Policy, the Communities Online: Acceptable Use of ICT Policy prohibits unauthorised data collection, creation or distribution of inappropriate material, breaches of individual privacy, and activities that compromise student welfare or system security. This policy is currently under review, and the updated draft includes advice on smart glasses.

In relation to preschools, any personal digital devices capable of recording or taking images of children are already banned in early childhood education and care services, under Education and Care Services National Law. This includes smart glasses. The Interim Safe Use of Digital Technologies and Online Environments Policy for ACT public preschools prohibits parents, carers and visitors from using personal electronic devices, such as mobile phones, smart watches or smart glasses, to take photos, record audio or capture videos of children educated and cared for at the preschool, including their own children. Educators, staff and volunteers may only use school-issued electronic devices at public preschool sites or when working with preschool children.

These requirements reflect 2026 changes to the Education and Care Services National Law, limiting the use of personal digital devices in education and care services, and how images of children can be captured, stored and transmitted.

We know there is always more to do in such a dynamic and shifting environment, but it is somewhat frustrating that those opposite assert that other jurisdictions are ahead of the ACT and then go on to list the work underway elsewhere that actually mirrors what we are already doing. As I noted, the Education Directorate is currently working through the complexities and challenges that other jurisdictions have also identified, to ensure that staff, students and families are safe.

Some key challenges that the directorate is working through are identification and enforcement. As Ms Vassarotti mentioned, and others as well, smart glasses closely resemble standard prescription eyewear, creating operational challenges for teachers and other staff to identify, monitor and require students to put away devices. In addition, devices may also contain prescription lenses, making physical removal unfeasible

without causing physical or visual impairment.

College students are currently permitted broader access to personal devices outside class times, reflecting the expectations that our young people will behave and engage appropriately, but leaving unstructured periods—recess, lunch and common areas—more vulnerable to covert recording and privacy complaints.

Finally, on policy governance for staff, while the interim safe use of digital technologies policy for ACT public preschools provides strict, explicit boundaries for staff handling early childhood images—mandating school-issued devices only, secure storage, and scheduled deletion—there is currently no equivalent policy that expressly governs staff members taking, retaining and using photographs of older school-age students across both mainstream and specialist schools.

These are some of the considerations that are being worked through. They are not, of course, insurmountable, but they do require thoughtful consideration to avoid unintended negative consequences. As others have acknowledged, we do not want to overlook the potentially significant benefit that smart glasses can provide as an assistive technology, particularly for people who are vision impaired. I do not imagine that members here would disagree that this detailed work is critical to ensure we do not disadvantage some of our most at-risk young people.

The Education Directorate is working through a number of specific circumstances as it considers this policy implementation and compliance challenge, to support both restrictions on, and the safe use of, smart glasses and similar digital devices.

More broadly, any new rules need to be implementable. We need to be mindful of who will enforce any restrictions and ensure those people are appropriately trained and supported to do so—particularly, for example, when staff at our public outdoor pools over the summer months are likely to be young people in casual work. In this regard, nuance can matter. Are smart glasses banned from being brought into a swimming pool area, or from being actually used as a recording device? The enforcement approach is likely to be different, depending on the rules. Having said that, there is benefit in having a clear rule. In most environments, no-smoking areas no longer need to be actively enforced, because there are clear rules and societal expectations.

The government is acutely aware of how rapidly the technology environment is shifting. Earlier today, in a tangentially related subject, I outlined the work we are doing to ensure cybersecurity is front of mind across government. Likewise, we take this emerging technology seriously, and we are moving quickly, with thoughtful purpose, to ensure we protect people's privacy and rights, while not inadvertently exposing our people, students, families and those that truly will benefit from these new products.

Like my colleagues, I thank Mr Cain and Ms Barry for bringing this matter to the Assembly, so that we can have this constructive debate today.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (4.18): I rise to support the principle that people should be able to go about their lives without being recorded unknowingly. I agree that governments need to respond to emerging technologies to ensure they are not misused for harmful or invasive purposes. The rapid growth of camera and AI-enabled smart

glasses presents genuine privacy concerns, particularly in sensitive environments such as change rooms, swimming pools, schools and childcare settings. It is entirely appropriate that the government examine additional protections.

It is also critical that we protect the legitimate use of this technology. For many people with vision impairment or other disabilities, wearable technology can serve as an important accessibility and assistive device. Any restrictions must be accompanied by clear exemptions and clear communication so that people are not inadvertently excluded from public spaces or subjected to discrimination. I look forward to hearing how this motion will be implemented, what enforcement mechanisms will be required and how staff and businesses will be supported to understand and implement new requirements. It requires a clear and workable framework.

I am also interested in how any future ban would apply to privately owned public facilities. For example, would a privately owned public swimming pool, such as the proposed new 25-metre pool at Phillip, be covered by the same protections? If not, will legislation be required to ensure residents receive consistent privacy protections, regardless of who owns the public space? Equally, how will disability access rights be protected if private operators adopt their own restrictions?

As the government considers its response, it must ensure that any measures are effective, enforceable and do not create unintended barriers for Canberrans who rely on this technology in their daily lives. I support the motion and look forward to the government providing further detail on how these important issues will be addressed. I thank Mr Cain and Ms Barry for bringing forward this important motion today.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (4.20): I thank Mr Cain and Ms Barry for bringing this important issue to the Assembly today. It is a particularly busy week for Ms Barry, with a bunch of motions, so this is very welcome. I would like to begin with something that risks getting lost in this public debate; although I note it has been picked up in the motion and in many members' remarks. For people with blindness, low vision or other disabilities that impair motor control, smart glasses are a genuine breakthrough in accessibility. The ABC recently highlighted just how much this technology means to many Australians, including Vision Australia's Chief Mission Officer Chris Edwards, who described it as life-changing for people like him. In his words:

The ability for smart glasses to help [give] a new level of independence for someone who's blind and low vision, on things that they would normally rely on other sighted people to do, is outstanding.

Guide Dogs New South Wales/ACT also had a few shout-outs in the debate, and they made this case powerfully. One of their clients, Scott, uses smart glasses to check the dosage on a medicine label, read a bus stop sign to get on the right bus home or even help him train his guide dog Pretzel by WhatsApp video, calling his trainer who lives an hour away. Independence—that is what these Canberrans gain from this technology. I thank Guide Dogs New South Wales/ACT for our meeting last week, for their tireless advocacy for people with low vision and blindness and for their generous new SeeWay initiative, which I would recommend checking out.

As we debate the risks of this technology, it is important to acknowledge the real

difference it is already making in people's lives. At the same time, I absolutely hear and share the concerns that have been raised. Every Canberran deserves to feel safe from being filmed without their knowledge or consent, especially when that footage can end up online in an instant, which we know involves its own serious safety implications. That is why I appreciate the Canberra Liberals highlighting that there are sensitive places where these glasses simply should not be worn.

It is creepy to imagine being secretly filmed or having your kids secretly filmed by someone wearing smart glasses at a swimming pool or public school. Protecting privacy and protecting accessibility are not competing goals. We can and should do both. On that basis I am very supportive of this motion, while acknowledging these issues will continue emerging. Smart glasses are the issue today. In a year or two it will be something else. Technology is often moving faster than legislation can keep up, and that gap is only going to grow if we are not more proactive.

Our approach should be proactive, not reactive where we are shutting new technology out once it has already proliferated and started causing harm. It should be to make sure new technologies actually work for us, showing leadership in deciding how, when and where we want new technologies to be part of our lives. Rather than reacting to each new device as it arrives, we should be building frameworks that futureproof Canberra. I note the minister reflected on this in her remarks. We need to embrace innovation while keeping our community safe.

I acknowledge also this is not just a policy question, it is a social one and a cultural one, but it is a question we need to ask and get serious about answering, given many of the technologies we are adopting without restriction or restraint seem to be causing more harm than good.

Again I thank Mr Cain and Ms Barry for bringing this forward today, and I am pleased there is such broad support across the Assembly for this motion and the commitments that we are making in the chamber today.

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (4.24): I also rise to speak in support of Ms Barry and Mr Cain's motion, and I thank them both for bringing it before the Assembly today. The Greens will be supporting this motion without amendment because it incorporates both an essential regulation for safety and privacy and a key consideration that is often left out of smart glasses conversation—that is, that the technology can be absolutely life-changing for people with a disability, and we in turn need proper exemptions incorporated into bans to protect this legitimate type of use.

Regulating new technology is something which the government of the day should always be alert to and ready to act upon. Smart glasses are no different, and my colleague Ms Vassarotti has already highlighted the pressing need for regulation and the real threat to privacy and safety which this technology, unregulated thus far in the ACT, has already brought in our communities. As the ACT Greens spokesperson for women as well as young people, education, and disability, I have been well placed to engage with all the corners of this debate and listen to the voices which might not be the loudest in mainstream media or in the halls of power. It is why today I do not want to spend this speech debating tech bros on the ethics behind smart glasses, because, to be honest, I think we all know that the community is behind this regulation—in fact

they probably wish we had done it sooner.

What I instead want to focus on is bringing the voices of those who are most impacted by the technology into this debate—I thank other members who have already done so—and this includes many who will be impacted by its prohibition. Many disability advocates have spoken both to the public and to the ACT Greens about what they worry will be lost if we do not get the exemptions and safeguards right for this ban. Again, as other members have mentioned, in his timely article the CEO of Guide Dogs New South Wales/ACT Ashley de Silva recently noted that smart glasses can help people read medicine labels, identify bus stops, navigate unfamiliar environments and connect with family, friends or support people when assistance is needed. In this way, they can make a real difference to people's daily independence and ability to engage in everyday places, whether that be work, home or the shops. That is why the Greens believe it is essential that restrictions on smart glasses are carefully designed in collaboration with people with a disability and that the government meaningfully engage with considerations of inclusion and accessibility. Mr de Silva goes on in his article to say:

We need councils that restrict smart glasses to exempt people who use them as an assistive aid on their word, not a permission slip, and design the rules with their disability reference groups.

Here in the ACT that might well mean us looking to consult with a ministerial disability advisory council and other Canberrans with a disability who would stand to benefit from such assistive technology. We need to be mindful of how regulations are applied in practice and the impact this might have on people who use the technology for legitimate accessibility reasons. We need to also bring this element of the smart glasses conversation into everyday discussions, as well as in this place and in our policy work, because how we speak about inclusion and how we practice it every day is incredibly powerful.

I say this especially in the context of the Invisible Disabilities Awareness Week. I would like to read out an excerpt from an article published by HerCanberra today. These are the words of disability advocate Melissa Hammond when asked the question, “How can the general public help and be more understanding of people with invisible disabilities?” Hammond says:

I think the most powerful thing is kindness. Many people with invisible disabilities face discrimination and disbelief because of how they look.

When you see someone who appears able using a disability aid, or someone who seems to need more time or assistance, pause and ask yourself: *Do I have all the information? Could this person have an invisible disability?*

Some invisible disabilities fluctuate too, meaning someone who had the capacity to do something yesterday may not be able to do it today. On difficult days, being met with hostility or having to justify your needs can be deeply distressing. Equally, being questioned about your disability because you look happy and well can be hurtful and invalidating.

The more we understand, the less likely we are to judge one another and the more likely we are to respond with empathy. A little curiosity, empathy, willingness to listen and kindness can make a significant difference. We don't need to know

everything about another person's circumstances to treat them with respect. Sometimes, the most important first step is simply being willing to listen.

I think we would all be well placed to hold this in mind in the context of this debate and how the government implements this regulation.

As I said before, I am also the ACT Greens spokesperson for women and young people and children, and I would like to speak briefly to what this regulation means for those groups, who will and indeed already do face the greatest risk of harm when technologies like this are used for exploitation, harassment or abuse. I will be honest: as a young woman on the internet, my initial reaction to learning about discreet recording-enabled smart glasses was for an unqualified ban. The first I saw of AI smart glasses were videos recorded by men harassing women, who were often around my age. I found that behaviour incredibly gross and demoralising. For many women and girls, discussing the dangers of secret recording is nothing new. It builds on the lived experience of too many and an awareness of existing threats. Smart glasses technology in its current form increases this potential threat significantly. I really worry that if left unregulated, this technology could fundamentally change how people experience public spaces, particularly women and girls.

The ACT Greens support the regulation of AI-enabled smart glasses in ACT government workplaces and sensitive facilities, including public schools, swimming pools, change rooms, early childhood settings and Access Canberra service centres. We support proper exemptions and safeguards for legitimate accessibility use, developed and delivered in consultation with the people who will use them.

We also believe that this debate should serve as a strong reminder that the need to respond and regulate rapidly emerging technology will not let up anytime soon; in fact it will only get increasingly frequent and urgent. It is critical that as we do our jobs to address this and regulate emerging technology we listen to every voice and do so in collaboration with those who it impacts most. Young people and children are entitled to privacy, to dignity, to safety, and because they cannot vote or make policy—yet—we must ensure our laws are fit to protect their rights. Parents rightly expect that schools, sporting facilities and community spaces are environments where children can learn, participate and socialise without being subjected to covert surveillance or unauthorised recording.

I am heartened by the fact that the Assembly is set to unanimously support the motion before us today and that we are committed to ensuring that there are exemptions for legitimate accessibility use. Let's all continue to bring the nuance and the less-heard voices into this ongoing discussion. I really look forward to receiving updates from the government on how their work to regulate smart classes progresses. Governments should work alongside people with a disability and representative organisations in developing how the regulation of smart glasses will function in practice. Those with lived experience are best placed to identify how privacy and safety concerns can be addressed without going backwards on inclusion.

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (4.32), in reply: I want to thank all the members who have spoken, including the Chief Minister, the Minister for Education, Ms Vassarotti and Miss Nuttall for the Greens. Thank you to the ministers from our ACT government for

supporting this motion from Ms Barry and me, and I thank Ms Carrick as well as Mr Emerson for their supportive statements. I think everyone has contributed in a similar theme that there are concerns about this technology but there are legitimate uses that we want to protect, particularly for those carrying a disability or who have some sort of medical reason or a temporary purpose.

I know I said in my opening, “Gee, wouldn’t it be wonderful if the government even had a bill in early next year to present to this Assembly?” but obviously it is open for the government to consider administrative arrangements that can immediately put into action what is being called on in this motion and what is, really, fully supported, in my understanding, by this Assembly. Whether there is legislation needed or not is obviously part of the scrutiny that will be undertaken, but certainly there is some legislation with some old dates and years on them that certainly would warrant review.

I think the community would welcome immediate administrative action from the government with the powers that they have available through their executive and through the roles that each of the ministers have for workplaces and public spaces, particularly pools and schools.

I do want to thank all the members who have spoken and really, I believe, spoken on behalf of their parties as well. I thank this Assembly for the support of this motion. We look forward to perhaps not just until early next year to hear some outcomes, but perhaps some outcomes as this government reviews this technology.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Papers

Motion to take note of papers

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: Pursuant to standing order 211A, I propose the question:

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

Education Directorate desktop review of tier 1 and 2 education capital projects 2019-2026

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) (4.35): We had some conversation earlier today in relation to Operation Kingfisher in question time, and the paper that has been tabled today is a demonstration of our commitment to ongoing transparency in responding to Operation Kingfisher.

As the Chief Minister indicated in question time, a substantial body of work has already been done to ensure that our procurement legislation was updated and that the specific issues that were identified by the Auditor-General via internal investigations have already been addressed quite substantively. Additional work has been done in relation to guidelines for ministerial staff and public servants about the role of ministers and officers in the procurement process, and that is outlined in the response to Operation

Kingfisher.

The report that has been tabled today with the papers is a summary of the Education Directorate's own analysis of the procurements that were undertaken between, if memory serves me correctly, 2019 and 2025 that looks at whether there are any risks on the face of it. It is a desktop review—as the Chief Minister said, further work will be done—looking at whether there are any red flags that would indicate there may have been a departure from the standard procurement procedures, as was the case in relation to Campbell Primary School, so things like the recommendations of the tender assessment panel not being accepted and a change in the delegate making the decision about the tender process.

I hope members will take the opportunity to understand that this is yet another piece of public information that we do not have a legal obligation to provide, but we are doing so in the interests of transparency, not only for the Legislative Assembly but for the wider Canberra community.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Utilities Legislation Amendment Bill 2026

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

Title read by Clerk.

MS ORR (Yerrabi—Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water, Minister for Disability, Autism and Neurodiversity, Minister for Housing and Homelessness, and Minister for Equality) (4.37): I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

I am pleased to present the Utilities Legislation Amendment Bill 2026 to the Assembly today. The bill introduces several minor amendments to both the Utilities Act 2000 and the Utilities (Technical Regulation) Act 2014. The bill is primarily about providing clarity for ACT utility regulators and regulated entities on the scope of matters which regulatory codes may deal with, as well as adding information-sharing provisions to support the efficient planning and operation of utilities.

This bill will support a safe, efficient, equitable and transparent energy transition for the ACT. It will ensure clarity for regulators and the community and that the economic and technical regulators are empowered to ensure utilities are operating in line with community expectations and interests. This bill will not change the regulations utilities operate under unless and until the relevant regulator goes through a formal code development process, which is subject to the requirements outlined in the acts, including public consultation.

In relation to the Utilities Act 2000, which pertains to economic and consumer protection regulation of utilities by the Independent Competition and Regulatory

Commission, the bill will do the following: within the current act objects, references to growth in utility service industries will be replaced with encouraging prudent and efficient long-term investment and sustainable levels of employment in utility service industries. This will remove the presumption of continual growth, which is no longer an appropriate aim for all utilities. The bill adds to the objects of the act that ending the provision of utility services and decommissioning of networks is carried out in a safe, efficient, equitable and transparent way. This amendment will improve regulatory clarity by making this object explicit rather than relying upon an implicit reading that the regulation of provision of a service also covers regulation of withdrawal of a service. Finally, for the Utilities Act, the bill will add to the list of example matters which an industry code may deal with to include ending the provision of a utility service, removal of a network facility, the decommissioning of a network and information sharing between utilities and about utility services.

In relation to the Utilities (Technical Regulation) Act 2014, which pertains to the technical and safety regulation of utilities by the Utilities Technical Regulator, the bill will do the following: it will make explicit that it is an object of the act to ensure that ending the provision of regulated utility services and decommissioning of regulated utility networks is carried out in a safe, efficient and transparent way. The bill will add to the purposes for which a technical code may be made to include the disconnection of customers, ending the provision of service, removal of a network facility, decommissioning of a network and information sharing about regulated utility services both between utilities and with the community. Finally, the bill will make minor amendments to the operating certificate application process to enable the regulator, via a notifiable instrument, to determine requirements for a regulatory plan and other relevant information. This change will replace the current process of the regulator requiring this information in an ad hoc way, reducing administrative burden on both the regulator and applicants. I commend the bill to the Assembly.

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

Statements by members

Canberra Alliance for Participatory Democracy

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (4.42): In your company, Mr Deputy Speaker, I was delighted to join the Canberra Alliance for Participatory Democracy, along with Ms Vassarotti, and the Active Democracy Bean group, who hosted a very interesting seminar presentation at the Canberra Irish Club on Monday night. The title of the presentation was “Do more MLAs make for better government?” Everyone is having a private thought about that question, I am sure! Perhaps even from the gallery here—they have heard that title.

It was really an interesting presentation and thoroughly researched by the two presenters Brodie Knox and Bill Browne, who gave us a survey of not just Westminster-based parliaments, which have had to adjust to growing populations and growing complexity in community expectations needing a legislative response of various types. It was interesting to see a free exchange of questions, and I put my own pennyworth in as well.

I want to commend the Canberra Alliance for Participatory Democracy and Active Democracy Bean. They are running a series called “Reimagining Governance for the

ACT”, and I look forward to further seminars.

Youth—Raise Our Voice in Parliament

MS ORR (Yerrabi—Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water, Minister for Disability, Autism and Neurodiversity, Minister for Housing and Homelessness, and Minister for Equality) (4.44): I am rising this evening to give a speech written as part of the Raise Our Voice Australia campaign. This speech was written by Xi Ning, aged 17, from my electorate of Yerrabi:

I never grew up being the only coloured kid in the room. From preschool to college, I have always been surrounded by peers of different backgrounds. Be it from the north, south, east or west, I was never once the only kid with a foreign background. It was a natural thing, everyone having their own cultures, customs and beliefs.

It is strange how something that never even occurred to me when I was younger could become something so important as we grew older. What difference does it make when someone has a different type of hair, different-shaped eyes or different-coloured skin? It meant nothing to me as a child, so why should it dictate who I am and the opportunities I am given now that I am older?

Funnily enough, racism is not black and white. Like us, racism is something that stems from an amalgamation of things—fear, history, politics. There is no one way of handling this issue, but we can always aim to be better—ensuring unbiased teachings of history, offering fair and equal opportunities to all Australians, and promoting empathy and respect in our country’s media. We can be better. We can be the multicultural Australia I saw as a child. We just need to take the right steps to build that bridge.

Public schools—funding

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (4.45): I want to share two very important pieces of correspondence I received this afternoon. The first one is from a kindergarten student at the Kaleen Primary School, and I want to share it. It reads as follows:

To Minister Stephen-Smith,

I go to Kaleen. Some kids at my school need extra help. It makes me sad that my school needs more help.

From Huxley.

I thank you very much, Huxley, for your correspondence. I would also like to read the correspondence from your sister Marni, who is aged eight. It reads as follows:

To Minister Stephen-Smith,

I go to Kaleen Primary. My school needs more support because there are some children that need more help. We have been going on too many strikes because there aren’t enough LSAs, teachers and relief teachers. My education matters. I care about my teachers, and they care about me. Please care about us!!!

From Marni.

I think we need to remember at times in this place what is important about what we do here. So, when this correspondence came into my inbox, I was very pleased to have the opportunity to share it with all of you today, because this is the future of Canberra. Their education matters, and they are writing to their local representatives about that, and that needs to be heard in this place.

Youth—Raise Our Voice in Parliament

MS TOUGH (Brindabella—Minister for Human Rights, Minister for Community Services, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Women, Seniors and Veterans, and Minister for the Prevention of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence) (4.47): I also want to rise this evening to read out some correspondence from a young person. I have got a speech here by Dia, one of the Raise Our Voice speeches that we have all been sharing in the chamber this week. This is the speech by Dia:

Respected members of parliament,

My name is Dia, and I am from CWSC. Australia is known as a fair-go country, though one in six Australians face racial discrimination every day. The “fair go” is that our national identity is only real if it applies to everyone. Racism in Australia is an ongoing story, starting 238 years ago when the British colonised Australia and marginalised First Nations culture. For decades we have ignored the generational trauma and ongoing institutional racism that the real owners of our land face every day.

Why should a person’s name or the colour of their skin dictate opportunities and their safety on our streets? I am only 12 years old, yet I have already faced verbal and racial discrimination repeatedly. Why should our future generations face the same crippling issues that we face today?

Parliament, in school we often learn about war, mental health and online bullying. We are educated on this to prevent what has happened in the past and to create a better future. Yet racism is not taught enough for kids to actually understand the mental and physical impact. Why? Why, is the reason we need to ask ourselves. Research shows one in five students face racial discrimination daily. Together, we can make Australia a fair go, not just for one race but for all.

Pregnancy and Infant Loss Month

MS LEE (Kurrajong) (4.48): October is Pregnancy and Infant Loss Awareness Month, and 15 October is the day that we remember our lost babies. I have spoken in this chamber about my personal experience, and I do so again because still, to this day, we have so many families who go through the grieving process alone. And I know Mr Deputy Speaker that you have spoken about your personal experiences.

I want every Canberra family to know that whilst we do have a specific month where we raise awareness, and whilst we have a specific day that we remember, for the many Canberrans who have that personal experience, it is something that is on their mind each and every day. It is important for us to put on the public record as an Assembly

that we are thinking of them. They are not alone in this grieving process, and it is something that we acknowledge.

Discussion concluded.

Adjournment

Motion (by **Ms Tough**) proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

Staff acknowledgement

MS TOUGH (Brindabella—Minister for Human Rights, Minister for Community Services, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Women, Seniors and Veterans, and Minister for the Prevention of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence) (4.50): Nearly three months ago I became a minister, and it has been an absolute whirlwind. I am so grateful for the opportunity. While I have appreciated the immense support around me in the transition, I want to take a minute to thank my incredible staff during this period, who have joined me today in the gallery. Becoming a minister is not easy, but it is also not easy for the staff, who are also faced with a massive transition and big changes.

I want to thank my incredible team who were with me on the backbench and have been incredible in supporting me in this transition: Alex, Sophia, Jade and Georgie. Alex has been with me since nearly the beginning here. Alex joined my office in December 2024, after he finished school, and has been incredibly dedicated to his job in this place. Alex and I met during the campaign, and he was with me week after week, day after day while doing year 12. I could not have asked for anyone more loyal, so thank you. Alex is a brilliant writer and communicator, and he has developed incredible parliamentary and committee process knowledge. He was my whip's clerk and my number-one committee guide. From planning to social to public accounts, Alex read every submission that came in on every inquiry and knew the details on every inquiry, which is no small feat. Today is Alex's last day. I wish him all the best into the future, and I am sure we will see him back here one day.

To Sophia, my incredible media officer, who moved on a few weeks ago from making me film reels and running my great social media and having lots of fun in the process—who joined me not long after Alex did, then went on exchange to Germany and came back with bigger and brighter ideas—thank you so much. I am really going to miss you.

To Jade, who could not be here this afternoon, who was my office manager and an incredible staff member—it was a pleasure working with you. I wish you all the best for everything into the future. Jade finished up with us last week.

To Tori, who joined the team temporarily, helping out in my office with communications, after leaving former Minister Berry's office—I wish you all the best and happy birthday for today. She was a great help.

To my interim team of advisers, Kim and Michelle, who came across from directorates in week one to get me across so many things. Michelle left us last week, and Kim is

leaving technically tomorrow, but she works from home on Friday, so, today, really, and I am extremely sad about this. I feel like my transition has been made easier with these two incredible women who know so much—all the question time briefs, all the prep, and everything, thanks to Kim and Michelle.

To Britt, who I can see is not in the gallery, who is probably hiding because she probably does not want to hear this—I do not think a new minister could have asked for a better interim chief of staff. Britt’s knowledge of all things ACT government, from process, to people, to policy, to the background knowledge she has and all the background detail is just incredible. I am sorry, Britt, for the number of headaches I have caused you over the past few months, and I appreciate so much your patience with the sometimes stupid questions I have asked along the way. You have been incredible, just absolutely incredible, these past few months, and I look forward to working with you now that you are going back to your substantive role in the Chief Minister’s Office. You will not be able to escape me that easily!

I also want to take a moment to welcome my new staff: Marc, my new Chief of Staff; Nyanwell, my new senior adviser; and Georgie, who is continuing on now as an adviser with me—well done. And Elise and Caitlin are my new DLOs who have been incredible this whole time with fielding questions from a new minister back to the directorate, getting me so many documents and briefs, and coming along on this journey while we found an office and got set up. They have just been absolutely incredible. And welcome to David and Emma, who are temporarily joining my office in the next few months as well, to help with the transition.

Mr Speaker, the last few months have been made so much better and so much more possible by the incredible people who are around me. I am going to miss the staff who are moving on, and I am really excited for the ones who are joining me.

Youth—Raise Our Voice in Parliament

DR PATERSON (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services, and Minister for Gaming Reform) (4.54): I am really excited to rise today for the Raise Our Voice contribution from a student that wrote to my office. So the student is Tanya, a year 6 student who is in the Assembly today from Charles Weston School in Coombs. It is a really nice synergy that it is Gambling Harm Action Week, and Tanya’s speech reflects this. So I will start by reading her speech:

Why we should discard games that resemble gambling.

My name is Tanya. I am 11 years old. I discovered an issue that not many may notice. Some games children play resemble everyday gambling. Many young children have devices at home; even me. They can be used to create new hobbies, discover friendships, and to learn about never giving up. But some games and fun websites can hide things that many children don’t understand and shouldn’t know.

Some games that a few children play might include a game where a child has to choose between three chests, then choose one, and then receive a prize. Another could be where the child has to spin a wheel in exchange for a type of currency and win a treasure. These games resemble subtle instances of betting, which could

get worse in the future, leading to actual gambling. When these young children get used to playing these types of games, they can start to think it's okay. Some adults also become oblivious, as many don't realise what their children are even getting into.

While writing this speech, I thought of some ways we and our government could work together to solve this minor but impactful issue. By keeping in mind what we are viewing and if it is appropriate, with no instances of betting or gambling. The government could block inappropriate websites, not just on school computers but also on ones outside of school premises. Lastly, we and the government could do age verifications properly so that all of us could be happy and so that this would be a great society.

So would you let yourself or your children play faulty games or go on websites that resemble gambling? I hope not, because these problems might be small, but in the future they could be huge. Don't you agree?

Well, I very much agree with Tanya, and I thank her very much for this fantastic speech. I was very proud to read it today.

Artificial intelligence—impact on youth

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (4.57): I wish to read a student speech as well, this time from one of my work experience students, Vaishnavi Raghav from Radford College, a year 10 student, who was in my office for the week, late in September, early October. This is the speech from Vaishnavi:

Artificial intelligence is rapidly changing the way we live, work and learn. In education, AI-powered learning tools are providing students with personalised support and greater access to learning opportunities. However, while these technologies offer many benefits, they also present important challenges. Traditional classrooms moved at a fixed pace which often left some students behind, while others remained unchallenged. All students have different strengths and weaknesses, so a fixed pace does not always work for everyone. This is why AI-powered learning tools are so useful. They change this dynamic by adjusting content difficulty, format and progression based on individual performance. These tools allow for all students to thrive and master subjects, with personalised support which ensures every student is set up for success.

Learning does not stop when the school day ends. but access to help often does. AI-powered learning tools are filling this gap by providing 24/7 academic support to students. Students can ask questions, get complex concepts clarified, or receive guided explanations at any time or place. This is particularly beneficial for students in different time zones, those balancing school with work, or learners who need repeated explanations to build confidence. These tools allow students to thrive, while ensuring that teachers can continue onto other topics without leaving students behind.

As schools become more reliant on AI-driven tools for teaching assessment and other tasks, there is a risk of becoming overly reliant on these technologies. Being completely reliant on technology for education diminishes the development of critical thinking, problem solving and creativity skills among students who may be using AI systems to provide answers and solutions. If students rely on AI to complete tasks for them, they may struggle independently to analyse information

and apply their knowledge in real-world situations. This hinders their ability to identify root causes, make informed decisions and develop effective solutions.

Traditional learning relied upon teachers providing not only academic instruction but also emotional support and mentorship. AI systems, while efficient, cannot replace the empathy, understanding and personal connection that human educators offer. This absence of human elements can affect students' social and emotional development, as well as their overall engagement and motivation in the learning process. Without human touch, we isolate students.

To maximise the benefits of AI while minimising the risks, schools should establish clear guidelines for its use. AI should be used as a tool to support learning and make it more accessible rather than replace genuine effort, development of essential skills or human interaction. By combining traditional teaching methods with AI-powered resources, educators can create a balanced learning environment that improves efficiency while preserving the essential human aspects of education.

In conclusion, AI has the potential to transform education by providing personalised learning experiences and round-the-clock academic support. However, over-reliance on technology and the loss of human interaction can negatively affect students' development. By implementing clear guidelines and using AI alongside traditional teaching methods, schools can ensure that technology enhances learning while preserving the important role of teachers. Thank you.

These were the words of Vaishnavi, a year 10 student from Radford College, who spent a week in my office recently.

Hyun-jae 'Jacob' Chong—tribute

MS LEE (Kurrajong) (5.02): I rise to celebrate and recognise the life and contributions of Hyun-jae "Jacob" Chong, who passed away unexpectedly in September this year at the age of 66. Hyun-jae was an integral part of the Canberra Korean community and will be missed by many. Hyun-jae was born in Korea and migrated to Australia in 1991 with his wife, Young-hea, and two young children, Sok Ho and Hea Hyun, or "Ariel". The family initially settled in Sydney and Hyun-jae started an educational consulting business. The family moved to Canberra in 1996 and Hyun-jae soon became a key part of the then fairly small Canberra Korean community.

Whilst Hyun-jae's passion was always education, and in particular providing Korean international students with a safe welcome to Australia so they could learn English and broaden their horizons living abroad, Hyun-jae also wanted to contribute to and serve the Korean community in Canberra. He was heavily involved with the Korean Association of Canberra, including serving as its president. His years of experience and service garnered support and respect from many who experienced his deep sense of duty to his community, his generous heart and his willingness to go above and beyond. As a result, he also served as Vice-President of the Federation of Korean Societies of Oceania. Since 2001, Hyun-jae was best known for his role as principal of the Canberra Korean School.

Hyun-jae and his wife, Young-hea, made the effort to ensure that their children retained

their Korean language, having migrated to Australia at such a young age. It was important to Hyun-jae and Young-hea that their children remembered their roots, were proud of their Korean heritage and did not forget their mother tongue. They realised that there were many other Korean parents who felt the same, so the school was started with 23 students from like-minded families, growing out of a shared goal to make sure that young Korean Australians are able to continue to learn their native language. Hyun-jae and Young-hea worked tirelessly to ensure that the school was relatable, accessible and relevant.

The school has grown to over 100, with a waitlist for beginner classes, and it is no longer a school that caters for just children of Korean migrants. Classes are held each Saturday from 9.30 to 12.30 during term times at the ANU, and the school boasts no fewer than eight classes, from kindy to adults. And the school does not just teach language in a vacuum; it is also about cultural immersion—making sure that children of Korean heritage, as well as those who have no previous Korean connection, have access to a full range of Korean culture, from history and language, Korean food and K-pop, to traditional music and dance. Each year at the Korea Day Festival, Canberrans can see the fruits of Hyun-jae and Young-hea’s labour, with musical performances by the children of the Canberra Korean School all wearing their bright coloured hanboks. And, never to be behind the times, the school also delivers special classes on K-pop, which I am told are incredibly popular, not least because they get the students out of class time.

Hyun-jae was a man of service who had deep pride in his Korean roots. He dedicated his life to bringing Korea to the world. This was not just a job for him; it was his life’s passion and his family’s passion. Whilst most of us know Hyun-jae in this role, to his team of teachers he was so much more. He was a leader who encouraged and nurtured them. Canberra has lost a giant in the Korean community, a dedicated principal, and a man with vision and dedication. But his wife, Young-hea, his son, Sok Ho, his daughter-in-law, Anita, his daughter, Hea Hyun, and his son-in-law, Michael, have lost a husband, a father and a father-in-law, and Eric, Aaron, Iris and Ellie have lost a loving grandfather who will not be there to see them grow up.

On behalf of Canberra’s Korean community, on behalf of this Assembly and on behalf of Canberrans, I express my sincerest condolences to Hyun-jae’s family, here today represented by his son, Sok Ho, and son-in-law, Michael. Hyun-jae made an enormous contribution to our city and he will be missed, but his life’s work will continue through the thousands of students he taught and through his children and grandchildren—also my daughter, Mia, and my partner, Nathan, who have, for at least the last year and a half, been able to take on learnings from Hyun-jae and his wife and will continue to ensure that Korean roots are not forgotten. Vale Hyun-jae “Jacob” Chong. May he rest in peace.

National Carers Week
ACT Children’s Week
Youth Justice Acknowledgment Day

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) (5.07): I want to take this opportunity to recognise three important occasions that relate to my children, youth and families portfolio across the month of October: National Carers Week, Children's Week, and Youth Justice Acknowledgement Day. While each has its own focus, they are united by a common purpose: supporting children and young people to be safe, strong, connected and given every opportunity to thrive.

National Carers Week was celebrated between 11 and 17 October, and this year carries the theme "Care for a carer: Making carers visible", as a reminder that carers make an extraordinary contribution to our communities every day and that they too need recognition, support and care. In particular, I acknowledge our foster and kinship carers. These remarkable individuals and families open their homes, hearts and lives to children and young people when they need stability, safety and care. They provide not only a place to live but also guidance, encouragement, belonging and love. Their dedication helps children navigate challenges, celebrate successes and build confidence in who they are. During National Carers Week, we thank them for their generosity, resilience and unwavering commitment.

As we also celebrate Children's Week later this month, we are reminded of the rights of every child and young person. This year's theme is based on Article 30 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which recognises that children have the right to use their own language, celebrate their culture and practise their religion. This is a powerful reminder that every child deserves to feel proud of their identity and to connect to their culture, community and beliefs. For many children, including those in out-of-home care, maintaining these connections is essential to their sense of belonging and wellbeing. When we celebrate diversity and support children to embrace who they are, we help create communities where every child feels respected, included and empowered.

On 13 October, I was lucky enough to celebrate Youth Justice Acknowledgement Day, which this year adopts the theme, "Better outcomes. Whoever you are. Wherever you are". It reflects the shared belief that every young person deserves the opportunity to succeed, regardless of their circumstances or the challenges that they may have faced. The theme reminds us that positive outcomes are most likely when young people are connected to supportive families, carers, communities and services.

Together, these three occasions highlight the importance of connection, belonging and support. They remind us that children and young people thrive when they are surrounded by people who care, and that carers, families and communities all have a vital role to play. I thank everyone who supports children and young people across our community. Through your care, compassion and commitment, you help create better outcomes for every child and young person, wherever they are.

Standing orders—suspension

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

That so much of the standing orders be suspended as would prevent the adjournment debate for today continuing for up to an hour

Dr Helen Haines MP—attack

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (5.10): Yesterday Helen Haines lost her second leg. At the end of this week I wanted to offer the Greens' reflections after a few days. We have been grieving with Helen and her partner Phil and her family over her sacrifice and her loss, I think along with pretty much the entirety of Australia and the people of Indi. I think it has been quite traumatic for a lot of us because it certainly does feel like it is a different moment in Australian history and Australian politics.

Helen is a remarkable woman. I did not know her, but my colleagues up on the hill do know her very well, and they have worked really closely with her. Dave Shoebridge was reflecting earlier this week that every time they saw her coming down the corridor their hearts would just lighten because here was a really, really good person coming towards them, someone who worked so hard, who spoke up so consistently for her people, who was so decent and diligent, and she will continue to make those contributions. I think they are really feeling that loss of Helen in the corridors quite deeply already. It has been quite emotional.

I think under privilege I can probably call it a violent attack. I think outside of privilege I have to call it the alleged attack. What has happened to Helen matters not just because of who Helen is but also because of what this represents and what this moment is in our politics. In Australia we have always expected our members to be really, really accessible. We expect them to attend events, walk the streets, visit schools, hold mobile offices and listen really carefully to the people they serve. I think not everybody would think that our politicians are necessarily doing that, but that is certainly the expectation. That accessibility has been one of the core strengths of Australian politics, and it relies on that simple understanding that disagreements are resolved through debate; they are not resolved through intimidation. Differences of opinion are resolved through votes, not violence. That is a really, really core principle of this.

The events this week have forced a lot of us to confront that. We have certainly had an increasing amount of information about the different environment we are in, and I think a lot of us, particularly the women in public life, are reflecting on that. Most of us have come here after receiving a certain amount of harassment, abuse or intimidation that maybe people who are not women have not necessarily experienced, but I think that has certainly stepped up this week, and I think many of us are thinking of that.

When women see abuse directed at our women leaders, when they are seeing those threats normalised, when they are seeing that violence enter political life, I think there is a real risk there that a lot of women will question whether public service is worth that risk, and that is an immense loss. We do need to make sure that our response is not primarily one of fear. We do need to reflect on this, and we do need to think about what we do next.

I have really appreciated all of the thoughts and views that are shared about lowering the temperature of public discourse. It is not a cliché. Those words really do matter. How we relate to each other and how we talk about different opinions are really, really important. One of the things I appreciate about the particular parliament that I belong to is, on the whole, we are much, much better at doing that in a respectful way and certainly in a peaceful and nonviolent way. I think in the Greens we are certainly

drawing inspiration from Helen's example, and we are certainly trying to make sure that we preserve that really important role of accessibility.

I will reflect on a personal note that yesterday, when the doctors were cutting off Helen's second leg, I went out and clipped the Greens triangle off my bike. I have been riding around Canberra with a great big Greens triangle on my bike for six years, and I have finally decided to take the advice I have been given repeatedly and wondered if maybe that is not a risk that I can take anymore. I am hoping with small changes like that that we can move on and preserve the type of accessibility that we have had.

Health Awareness Week

MS VASSAROTTI (Kurrajong) (5.15): I wanted to speak just to recognise a couple of particular health-related awareness weeks that are happening in this month. First of all, I want to say a big thankyou to the Heart Foundation for holding their showcase today, where staff could come and get their own heart health check, and I wanted to mention that 16 October was Restart a Heart Day. More than 32,000 Australians experience an out-of-hospital cardiac arrest, but only around one in 10 survive. In the ACT around 496 people die from cardiovascular disease each year. Quick action from someone nearby can make a critical difference. The good news is that you do not need medical training to help. If someone suffers a cardiac arrest, call 000, push hard and fast in the centre of the chest and shock with an AED as soon as possible. The Heart Foundation has summarised it in three simple steps that could help save a life: call, push, shock. I encourage everyone in the ACT to take a few minutes to learn call, push, shock and share the message with family, friends and colleagues. I would like to acknowledge the time and effort the Heart Foundation put into their advocacy on this.

This month is also National Multicultural Mental Health Month, and the theme is "Supporting women's mental health every day". The theme aims to draw attention to the challenges that many women face to their wellbeing and how people can support women's wellbeing. Since we have not achieved greater equity and equality, women face particular challenges in relation to safety, as we have seen this week vividly with the attack on Helen Haines, as well as challenges to respectful relationships, finances, caregiving, as well as issues related to pregnancy, the postpartum period and menopause. According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 44 per cent of women in Australia experienced a mental health challenge at some point in their life, and for women between the ages of 16 and 24 nearly half of them experienced a mental health challenge in the last year. That is why the Mental Health Foundation Australia are encouraging everyone to take up opportunities that they are offering for people to learn, access support and reach out to support each other, not just this month but every day.

It also happens to be Liver Cancer Awareness Month. Over 3,000 Australians are diagnosed with liver cancer each year, and part of the problem is that someone who has it may not experience any symptoms to begin with, but having regular liver checks and making sure your liver disease is managed well is the best way to have a great chance of health and survival. Thanks to the Liver Foundation for the work that they do and the information they provide to raise awareness of liver cancer and support those suffering from it.

Youth—Raise Our Voice in Parliament

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (5.18): I am pleased to read this speech, which has been written by a young person from my electorate as part of the Raise Our Voice in Parliament campaign.

My name is Matilda, I am 13 years of age, and I am proud to have two parents that both work in the trades.

I have had the opportunity to watch my parents build a bright future for me and my little sister. Despite that, our family has received discrimination because my parents wear hivis for a living.

In today's society there is still a belief held that a person from a blue collar industry is somehow un-educated or is of less value than someone that attended university.

It is often drilled into young people that university is the only option to choose for a good career path. I know this is not true. My father lays bricks, working tirelessly to construct the buildings that we use every day.

Like this great house my speech is being heard in. He has helped build schools, reccentres, hospitals, and homes for families. My mother works as a high voltage electrician, in an industry that is building green infrastructure; like big batteries, wind farms, and solar energy.

All will help make this planet a healthier place.

Both my parents have jobs that can be done from anywhere, allowing us the freedom to explore and live in different places.

Neither have student debt, and earned a wage while they got their education.

Enabling them to move into their industries debt free and with a good middle class wage.

I believe that greater information needs to be given at younger ages that university is not always the best option for a bright future.

This needs to be encouraged in school aged children so that we meet the skills shortage that we face in my generation.

Parliament can make these changes by running campaigns targeted towards school aged children so they know that a uniform that is Hivis is just as important as any other job that you can get from going to university.

Thank you, Matilda. You are right, and I hope that everyone values the work tradies do because we could not live the lives that we have without them. So let the discrimination stop today.

Youth—Raise Our Voice in Parliament

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (5.21): Likewise, my speech is part of Raise Our Voice in Parliament 2026, which is young people's chance to make an impact. It is with great

pleasure I have to read a speech prepared by Alexander, aged 15, from the electorate of Yerrabi. I must say it is very poetic, and I really appreciate his writing. I will start now:

Look out a window. Find a tree. What does it look like? How long has it been there? I bet you can tell me what it looks like, but I bet you can't tell me how long it's got left. It's the same with climate change; we can see it happening, but we don't know how long we have left. Species are going extinct up to a thousand times faster than they should be, not because of an asteroid or an ice age, because of us.

I found a tree standing all alone. Alone, but peaceful. Peaceful, but alone. But as our planet heats up, that peace is becoming harder to find. That tree could easily become a stump, charred, left standing to remind us of the future we chose, alone and dead. Dead and alone. This is the future we are leaving for every Australian who comes after us. Is that what we want?

Parliament must take stronger actions by setting stronger emissions targets and putting real policies behind them. But that tree isn't waiting for a bill to pass. It needs all of us to act like this is as urgent as it is. I'm 15. I don't get to vote yet. This speech is the closest thing I have to one. So I am asking you to change, because that tree deserves to be our inspiration for a greater future. Thank you.

Thank you, Alexander, for your wonderful speech. I look forward to the day when you can vote, when you can participate in politics and take the action to meet the existential challenge that is climate change. In the meantime, I hope I can live up to your speech and the demands it places on us as representatives.

Youth—Raise Our Voice in Parliament

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (5.23): I rise today to share the words of Stephen, a 12-year-old student from my electorate—and your electorate indeed, Mr Speaker—as part of the Raise Our Voice in Parliament campaign.

Before I do I want to acknowledge every young person who took the time to write speeches for this campaign, both those whose words have been read into the record by members throughout this week—it has been amazing being in this place to hear so many of those speeches read—but also those whose words have not been read into the record. Taking an interest in and making a contribution to the decisions that shape your community is important. Thank you to every one of you for being prepared to stand up for the future of our territory before you are old enough to cast a vote. That engagement is worthwhile, and this Assembly is better for hearing the voices of young people in so many speeches this week.

I would like to thank all of my colleagues from across the Assembly who have read speeches this week. It was great to see so many of you at the launch, meeting the young people whose voices we are raising.

Finally, it is worth acknowledging and I think reflecting on the top issues presented by the young people in these speeches: education, cost of living and the impact of AI and all of the other subjects that were raised. The important thing here is not just to read these speeches but to hear them and engage with them. On to Stephen's speech:

Hello, my name is Stephen. I am 12 years old, and my electorate is Murrumbidgee. The housing crisis in Australia can be a massive problem for Australian citizens across the country. It can affect things such as mental health, stress about rent or not being able to afford a house, homelessness, the cost of living in Australia, the future of young people and many more. The housing crisis in Australia is changing how we see the country day by day.

Currently in Australia the average house price is at an all-time high. This issue is very important because it impacts almost every aspect of life in Australia. The cost of living with such high housing prices, threatening mental health because of stress from rent and mortgage, young people's futures. Not being able to afford housing leads to having bad opportunities in life. The economy, businesses slowing down. People have fewer opportunities to build wealth and overall the way Australia is today.

Some steps the government can take to help fix the housing crisis include building more affordable housing. Affordable housing is housing designed for lower income people. This could mean funding more apartment complexes, using more land for housing and supporting housing specifically for long-term renting, improving public transport range. Improving public transport range can give people more flexibility for the location of a house because they do not have to worry about how to get from place to place. Supporting buildings such as townhouses, duplexes and apartment complexes.

In conclusion, the housing crisis is a serious problem in Australia. It can affect everyone. The issue can affect mental health, the cost of living and young people's future and opportunities. The government can help by supporting homes that are more affordable for low-income people, improving public transport and supporting affordable housing.

Thank you, Stephen.

Light rail stage 2B—benefits

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage, and Minister for Sport and Recreation) (5.27): I rise today to deliver a speech prepared by a student, Karnik Dangwal, from my old school, Melrose High School, who completed a short stint of work experience in my office this week. His speech is titled "Commercial, social and environmental benefits that light rail can bring to Woden". In his words:

There is no doubt about the success light rail has had in connecting Gungahlin to the city. From hundreds of new businesses opening near the tracks, to relieving congestion on vital roads, it's important we extend this transport to other areas of the Territory. Woden is a commercial area and is the Southside's major shopping centre as well as a vital hub for clubs and the public service.

With more lines further south, it can provide access to 100s of jobs for residents. Along with that, it can connect public servants from Gungahlin and the city to Woden, relieving daily morning congestion around the city. The areas around Woden centre remain low density. With light rail, it can facilitate densification of land which in turn, yields more home. By putting more homes in the corridor from the city to Woden, urban sprawl can be reduced, helping combat one of the biggest long-term problems in the territory.

Commercial light rail will encourage development ranging from hospitality to other forms of business, bringing more people to work boosting economic productivity. Along with additional businesses comes jobs that can be filled by young Canberrans in Southside as well as local students or unemployed people.

Environmentally, light rail runs on 100% renewable energy helping reduce many commuters' carbon footprint. This acts against climate change by reducing the CO2 emissions released which improves locals and visitors' health.

In terms of interconnectivity, Light rail in Woden would be easy to access, with several bus lines bringing people from Tuggeranong, Erindale, Weston, and Tharwa. The addition of a larger bus fleet and depot in Woden will help improve the frequency of buses arriving in Woden, bringing more people to access light rail to the Northside. This proves light rail in Woden as a smart investment being connected by other factors rather than being an isolated system that's hard to access.

For people in Woden a long drive to Gungahlin, which emits large amounts of toxins in the air, can be substituted for a simple light rail trip that's economically smarter and helps provide businesses along the corridor with more patrons from across the area.

For young people, a common activity done is wandering around malls with friends, enjoying what's around. Students from Gungahlin, must take two different forms of transport to reach Woden ... This limits kids in a bubble around their district and the city, rather than venturing beyond. With the addition of light rail, it breaks this bubble, helping kids travel from Woden to Gungahlin in a single trip. The economic benefits are significant as well, as unique companies only based in certain malls, now have a wider patron range. Personally, I would be travelling from Woden to Gungahlin, exploring stores and meeting people who live there, helping my personal interconnectivity with goods, services, and people that matter. This would be similar behaviour from many people across my age bracket

This is why it's important we recognise the importance of light rail and its wide range of benefits that it can bring activity to the Woden area.

They were the words of Karnik. Thank you, Karnik, for your time that you spent in my office and for this very thoughtful speech about the importance of light rail to Woden.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

The Assembly adjourned at 5.31 pm until Tuesday, 27 October 2026 at 10 am.