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OF THE

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

FOR THE

AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

DAILY HANSARD

Edited proof transcript

29 October 2026

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Thursday, 29 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.

Petitions

The following petitions were lodged for presentation:

Sports grounds—parking—petitions 78-26 and 101-26

By **Mr Milligan**, *from 77 and 485 residents, respectively:*

> Mr Milligan, from 77 and 485 residents, requesting that the Assembly call on the ACT Government to work with all stakeholders to upgrade and expand car parking and facilities at all sports grounds across Canberra (Pet 078-26 and Pet 101-26).

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

The Clerk having announced that the terms of the petitions would be recorded in Hansard and referred to the appropriate ministers for response pursuant to standing order 100, the petitions were received.

Motion to take note of petitions

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

> That the petitions so lodged be noted.

Sports grounds—parking—petitions 78-26 and 101-26

MR MILLIGAN (Yerrabi) (10.02): Today I am tabling a petition calling for better facilities at sportsgrounds across Canberra, particularly when it comes to car parking. As has been mentioned 100 times in this place over the year, Canberra has the highest sporting participation rate in the country. Our sporting clubs are growing, more kids are getting involved and more families are turning up to support their local teams, but the infrastructure has simply not kept up. It is not just the people playing sport who are

affected; it is also the volunteer coach arriving early at the sports field to set it up, the grandparents who want to watch their grandkids play sport, and local residents who find their own driveways blocked by cars parked in side streets every weekend. Any other government would identify this problem and look for a solution. Unfortunately, the ACT Labor government has instead chosen to take advantage of the situation.

A *Canberra Times* article earlier this year noted that Access Canberra issued 39 parking fines across eight sports fields in a single weekend. Sporting clubs' volunteers and parents are the newest in the line of groups of people in Canberra suburbs who are paying the price for a government that is desperate for money. This has been an issue for hundreds of Canberrans. Many have reached out to members of the opposition to raise their concerns. On their behalf, I wrote to the minister, asking if the ACT government had plans to increase parking availability at any of the sportsgrounds in Canberra. This is the response I got: "The ACT government has no current plans to expand parking at its sportsgrounds." That response is incredibly disappointing for the sporting community. It is why the community and the Canberra Liberals are presenting this petition to the Assembly today, to remind the government that this is an issue that will not go away until they act.

I particularly thank my colleagues Mr Cocks and Ms Barry for their efforts in supporting this petition. I also thank the members of the community who gave up their weekends to door-knock and spread the word.

Our sporting clubs are run by hardworking volunteers who give up their evenings and weekends to run their clubs. At a sports ground roundtable earlier this year, they made that very clear. They want a solution from us, not more politics. I commend this petition to the Assembly.

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (10.04): I thank Mr Milligan for sponsoring this petition, as well as all of the people involved in getting it off the ground. I pay special tribute to the Weston Molonglo Football Club, who paid a lot of attention and have come together around this question because the parking situation at Waramanga is pretty diabolical. The club, with over 1,000 playing members, plus their families, has a grand total of, I think, 75 parking spaces. The impact of this is that, every weekend throughout the football season, the residential roads throughout the area are utterly clogged. They are utterly congested. It is extremely difficult to navigate your way through the area. I know that multiple people in this place will have tried to do so. It also creates a bit of a barrier to kids actually getting involved and participating in sport.

Mr Milligan thanked me for my efforts. One day I went to get some signatures for this petition, along with the club there, but I have to say that I did not do much. All I had to do was stand there with a bit of paper and people lined up to sign it, because this is not some confected problem; this is one of the things that people feel every week. And it is not just football clubs and it is not just at Waramanga; it is also across Canberra. If you go to Tuggeranong—in your electorate, Mr Parton—there are kids trying to play netball through the netball season and you will contend with the same issue. If you are in Belconnen, you will face the same problem. If you are in Deakin, where people are trying to play sport on the ovals in that sporting precinct, you are going to run into the same issue. That means that it is a challenge for the children who are trying to play their sport on the weekend. As many people said to me on that day in Waramanga, "Surely

we want to see more kids actually getting out, getting fit, getting healthy and participating. We don't want to see more barriers to them doing so."

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS (Brindabella) (10.07): I completely agree with the intent of the motion. It is a really interesting point. A lot of playing grounds are underserved by car parks at specific times of the week at Wanniassa; Gordon; Calwell, for instance, in Tuggeranong; Weston Creek; and Waramanga, where I played in the under 7s. It was crowded then and it remains crowded when my daughter is there. The issue is presumably about where you put the car parks—for instance, in Waramanga. I cannot think of a better place to put a car park except on one of the ovals. The asphalt would need to take up one of the areas where the children play. It would be the same principle at Calwell and it would be the same principle at Gordon.

You can put in more car parks, but, by definition, they take up more green space. That is the question you need to ask and that is the bit that needs to be discussed. Car parks, yes, but where do they go, and what is the conversation about the space they take up? Do you get rid of green space to make what is left of it more accessible, or do you keep it as far as you can and work with what you have, which means that more people will be able to play at times and it puts less stress on the grounds that we have? That is a question; it is not a criticism of the motion. It is a really interesting question and one that my colleague Ms Castley and I were discussing when we were on the Standing Committee on Transport and City Services together: how does this city work with car parks and the need for more car parks—presumably as more cars are on the road—but the green space within established suburbs is not getting any bigger?

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Vietnam trade mission
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) (10.09): In July, the government completed a trade mission to Vietnam focused on growing education exports, increasing tourism, attracting investment, strengthening research partnerships, and expanding cooperation in clean energy and innovation.

The timing of the mission was very good. It was undertaken just ahead of the visit to Canberra by the President of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, His Excellency Mr To Lam. His Excellency was accompanied by a substantial delegation of senior Vietnamese government representatives, business leaders and investors. I understand they visited only two cities in Australia: Sydney and Canberra. The President's visit reinforced the growing strength of the Australia-Vietnam Comprehensive Strategic Partnership and created another important opportunity to advance Canberra's economic interests post our trade mission.

During the mission, our government delegation met with senior representatives of the Vietnamese government, together with Vingroup, Becamex Group, Sun Group, Vietjet, universities, education agents, tourism operators, Tourism Australia, Austrade, an extensive and wonderful Canberra alumni in Vietnam, and in-market representatives of

Canberra's universities. The objective was simple: grow Canberra's share of Vietnam's rapidly expanding education, tourism, investment and innovation markets.

Education remains the ACT's largest economic relationship with Vietnam. Almost 600 Vietnamese students currently study in Canberra across our universities, vocational education institutions and schools, contributing an estimated $30 million to $35 million annually to the territory economy. The trade mission identified opportunities to strengthen partnerships with Vietnamese universities, schools and education providers, expand pathway programs and student exchanges, and grow enrolments in areas where Canberra has competitive strengths, including artificial intelligence, engineering, health, public administration, renewable energy and digital technologies. Working with Study Canberra, the ANU, the University of Canberra, UNSW Canberra and the CIT, our objective is to increase Vietnamese student enrolments by 50 per cent over the next five years, growing the market's value to more than $45 million to $50 million annually.

Tourism also represents Canberra's strongest growth opportunity in Vietnam. More than 153,000 Vietnamese visitors travelled to Australia last year. The government delegation met with tourism operators and major groups, including Vietjet and Sun Group, to promote Canberra as a destination for leisure travel, education-related travel, business events and government engagement. Undoubtedly, aviation growth between Australia and Vietnam will be a key driver of future demand. Vietjet continues to expand services between Vietnam and Australia, whilst the Sun Group is investing in aviation and tourism infrastructure through Sun PhuQuoc Airways, which has identified Australia as a future growth market.

Working with Tourism Australia, Austrade, Visit Canberra, Study Canberra and our industry partners, our strategy is focused on increasing Canberra's share of the Vietnamese visitor market through destination marketing, stronger travel trade partnerships, education-linked visitation, and business events. By 2030, the objective is to increase Canberra's share of Vietnamese visitors to Australia by 25 per cent. Achieving this target will generate an additional $8 million to $12 million in annual visitor expenditure and increase the value of the Vietnamese visitor market to around $30 million annually. To put some perspective on that, that is about half the value that Floriade generates for our city in a year, so this is a significant opportunity.

Research collaboration was also a major focus throughout the mission. Canberra's universities, research institutes and policy organisations are well-placed to collaborate and partner with Vietnam institutions across a range of fields, particularly in knowledge-intensive industries, the net-zero transition and climate adaptation. The mission strengthened relationships with major Vietnamese companies and investors who are seeking opportunities in Australia. Discussions focused on renewable energy, electric vehicle infrastructure, smart-city technologies, tourism infrastructure and innovation-led industries.

Meetings with the Vingroup highlighted the opportunities across electric vehicles, renewable energy, education, research, and urban development. Engagement with the Becamex group was particularly significant. As one of Vietnam's leading industrial and innovation developers, Becamex has played a major role in industrial precincts, logistics infrastructure, innovation hubs and smart-city projects. We have identified opportunities to connect Canberra's innovation ecosystem with Becamex through

research partnerships, technology commercialisation, skills development and start-up growth.

It would be fair to say that Canberra's achievement of 100 per cent renewable electricity and progress towards net zero generated strong interest throughout the mission. I am pleased to advise the Assembly that Vietnam is investing heavily in renewable energy, transmission infrastructure, battery storage, electric mobility and climate resilience. The government has identified opportunities for cooperation in these areas: renewable energy, battery technologies, electric vehicle infrastructure, emissions reduction, climate adaptation and sustainable urban development. These relationships were strengthened with the government of Vietnam at a national level, but also the cities of Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City at a municipal level, together with a range of leading commercial entities, providing a strong foundation for continued engagement and future cooperation.

The government has identified the following priorities for the next five years: increase Vietnamese student enrolments in Canberra by 50 per cent, as I have mentioned; increase the share of Vietnamese visitors to Australia coming to Canberra by 25 per cent; and generate an additional $25 million to $30 million in annual economic activity through growth in education exports and visitor expenditure. We are also seeking to expand research, innovation and workforce development partnerships between the ACT and Vietnamese institutions. These targets will be delivered in partnership with Study Canberra, Tourism Australia, Austrade, the ACT's universities and training institutions, and our industry partners.

I would like to thank Ambassador Gillian Bird; Consul-General Kate Wallace; the Senior Trade and Investment Commissioner of Vietnam, Emma McDonald; Tourism Australia; Austrade; Study Canberra; our ACT education institutions—whom I mentioned already have in-market presence in Vietnam, which is terrific to see—the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade; and, of course, our Vietnamese hosts for their support throughout the mission. I would also like to acknowledge staff from the Office of International Engagement, Study Canberra, and Visit Canberra for their work in delivering the mission.

In closing, Canberra is well placed to deepen its partnership with Vietnam. This mission has established a strong platform for growth in education, tourism, investment, research and clean energy cooperation. I think it is important that we maintain regular engagement with Vietnam. They regularly send inbound delegations to Canberra that we have hosted. I look forward to this work continuing.

I present the following paper:

> Vietnam Trade Mission—Ministerial statement, 29 October 2026.

I move:

> That the Assembly take note of the paper.

MR PARTON (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (10.18): I understand that there is an expectation that the Chief Minister provides reports to the Assembly of his

international travel, in this instance to Vietnam, and I look forward to hearing about Europe at some stage. It disappoints me that the report did not include the cost to taxpayers. Of course, it did outline plenty of potential positive outcomes from the trip, and that is important.

I understand that the standing orders of this place do not compel me to provide a report to the parliament of my international travel earlier this month, given that not a single cent of taxpayer funding went toward that trip, but, like Mr Barr's travel, it was a trip that was aimed at getting better outcomes for the territory. I would like to put on the record that, following the announcement on Wednesday, 7 October from the Canberra Airport Group, Canberra Data Centres and other relevant stakeholders pertaining to a potential civic stadium, I sensed a seismic shift in the public conversation around this proposal, which loosely lines up with the policy that the Canberra Liberals took to the election of 2024.

Given the stubborn pig-headedness of the Chief Minister and his refusal to even remotely consider a proposal for a stadium in the city until that point, I saw 7 October as a pivotal moment which could lead to a sufficiently large change in the public conversation that would potentially force the government to ease its opposition to what would clearly be a great outcome for the city. As part of my party's examination of the city stadium idea, my office already had meetings with a number of stakeholders and potential stakeholders, including the Catholic Church, the Airport Group, various architects, and even potential investors. We had loosely scheduled a visit to Christchurch in December for me to see the stadium firsthand. I found out about the Canberra Airport announcement before dawn on 7 October, and I made the decision pretty much then and there to bring my travel to Christchurch forward and to travel on the following day.

I believe that one of the great weaknesses of our parliament is that non-executive members have no travel allowance. I do not wish to go into the reasons that we arrived at that position but just say that the fact that the main opposition party has very limited means to assess any policy outcomes firsthand in other jurisdictions does not strengthen our democracy. I think it significantly weakens it.

On the Thursday afternoon, I flew to Christchurch via Sydney, returning across Sunday night and Monday morning via Auckland and Melbourne. My first meeting on Friday morning was with BESIX Watpac, with Martin and Tiaan, who initially walked me through the project at the firm's Christchurch offices. They explained that the construction ran from 2022 to 2026, it combined major seismic engineering and cultural design elements, and there was a fixed-price $NZ683 million contract to deliver Christchurch's new multi-use arena. They broke ground on 8 April 2022 and the completion and opening was on 27 March this year.

I learnt about the massive role that seismic resilience played in the project. Populous described the stadium as "a long-span structure engineered for high seismic activity". When you see the stadium, you can clearly see that they have separated the stands from the roof structure so that they can each move independently during an earthquake. I met with Leeann Watson from Business Canterbury. We had a long discussion about the economic impact of the stadium on Christchurch. The new stadium generated $21 million for the local economy in its first 60 days, almost half of what it was forecast

to bring in an entire year. Also, people attending rugby matches at One New Zealand Stadium are spending double the amount of money on food and drink than people spent when they watched games at the previous stadium. Food vendors inside the stadium, who are all local companies, have been paid $1.6 million for their fare.

When I walked the city, I spoke to business owners, locals and tourists. I could not elicit a negative comment about the stadium from anywhere. I think it was extremely important for me to see the stadium on a game day. I was a guest of BESIX Watpac for the NPC quarter-final clash between Canterbury and Waikato. This is a mid-tier game. It attracted around 12,000 fans. I saw them having lunch in the city prior to the game. I saw tourists to the city shopping in the city CBD before strolling over to the game. Some came on public transport and some drove. I spoke to many of them. For a great number, it was their first visit to the stadium.

The only negative that I could share is that it was a 22-degree day with a blue sky in Christchurch and, when the sun shone through the see-through sections of the roof, it was hot. I do not know what the temperature was inside the stadium, but I would have guessed it was over 30 degrees. The roof on the Christchurch stadium does not open. There are louvres on the sides of the stadium and there are massive ceiling fans, but it was really warm on a 22-degree day. I would hate to think what it would have felt like on a 30-degree day for an A-league match. I think that is an indication that the exact design in Christchurch would not necessarily be fit for purpose in Canberra. I think it is important that I experienced that firsthand.

My travel was all self-funded. I spent $2,120.62 on flights from Canberra via Sydney to Christchurch on Qantas, Christchurch to Auckland on Jetstar, and Auckland to Canberra via Melbourne. I spent $554.75 on accommodation in Christchurch at the Ramada Suites by Wyndham and $218 on delightful accommodation in Melbourne at the ibis budget, where the lift did not work, to get four hours of sleep before catching the 6 am flight back to Canberra, ahead of an all-day planning day. I spent just over $100 on taxi transfers to and from the airport in Christchurch but chose to do the rest of my transfers on foot. I spent around $200 on additional expenses—mostly meals—and I declare that I received a complimentary ticket to the game on the Sunday from BESIX Watpac New Zealand. I guess my snout is in the trough! The whole exercise cost me $3,200, but I think it was well worth it.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Personal explanation

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS(Brindabella) (10.24): Under standing order 46, I seek leave to make a personal explanation.

MR SPEAKER: Leave is granted by me.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I was misrepresented by Ms Lee. In yesterday's speech in closing her debate on the motion, with regard to the lived experiences of public school parents—parents like me and my parents, but unlike Ms Lee—the lived experiences of public school principals, public school teachers—like my father—and public school learning support assistants, as well as the lived

experiences of public school children—public school students like all of my children—Ms Lee said: "According to Mr Werner-Gibbings, his lived experience is the one that trumps them all."

The *Hansard* will reflect I did not say or imply anything of the sort in my remarks. I have not, and will not, set my experience and understanding of the ACT public system's challenges and opportunities above that of my fellow supporters, users and believers in it. Rather, I rely on my lived experience and a growing understanding of the issue therefrom as the grounding of my engagement with it and my comments. For the avoidance of doubt, I did imply in my remarks that my lived experience and actions in support of ACT public education trumps Ms Lee's words, and I am happy to make that explicit for the Assembly.

Health and education—major capital works—update
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) (10.26): I note that I am on the notice paper as delivering this statement in my role as Minister for Education, but I am also speaking as Minister for Health Infrastructure.

The ACT government is committed to ensuring every Canberran has access to excellent health care and educational opportunities now and into the future. With our population soon to exceed half a million and projected to grow to more than 800,000 by 2065, Canberra's growth requires significant investment in infrastructure and services that underpin a strong community. This includes modern hospitals, health facilities, schools and learning environments that will meet the needs of a growing city for decades to come.

The ACT government is committed to delivering a high-performing public health system that provides safe, effective and person-centred care for individuals and families. The ACT Health Infrastructure Plan outlines the government's investment in hospitals, health centres and community-based facilities across the territory over the coming decade. This investment is focused on ensuring Canberrans can access quality health care closer to home.

The centrepiece of the ACT government's health infrastructure agenda for the remainder of this decade is the delivery of a new hospital for Canberra's north side. This project represents the largest health infrastructure investment in the history of the territory. The total commitment of nearly $1.5 billion is an investment that reflects both the scale of community need and the government's determination to provide health infrastructure that will serve Canberrans for generations.

The redevelopment of the North Canberra Hospital campus will replace aging infrastructure facilities, originally built in 1979, and create a contemporary hospital designed around modern models of care. The redevelopment will deliver a new seven-storey clinical services building containing more than 300 treatment spaces. This facility will become a cornerstone of the territory's health system and a major gateway for healthcare services on Canberra's north side.

Importantly, the building is being designed to support patients, families and healthcare workers—the same approach we took to the Canberra Hospital expansion in delivering an environment that supports healing and is a great place to work. The new north side hospital will improve access to the emergency department, including dedicated access for ambulances; integrate clinical services, teaching and training facilities in a single location; and provide welcoming, modern spaces that enhance the patient experience.

A new state-of-the-art emergency department with 63 treatment spaces will significantly enhance emergency care capacity. Dedicated short-stay units for adults and children will support more efficient patient flow and improve patient experiences. The new building will include more than 200 inpatient beds to deliver expanded medical and surgical services, helping to meet growing demand for hospital services across the territory. It will feature a modern 14-bed intensive care unit, eight operating theatres with capacity to expand to 10 when required, and two endoscopy suites with provision for a third as demand grows.

The redevelopment will also support the expansion of midwife-led continuity of care and maternity services by including a new co-designed birth centre on the ground floor with a separate entrance, as well as six birthing suites in the upper-level maternity ward. Together, these eight birthing spaces, supported by maternity inpatient accommodation and a special care nursery, will provide families with modern facilities during some of life's most important moments. Outpatient services will also be expanded, creating additional capacity for pre-admission clinics, specialised outpatient services and allied health care.

But the benefits of this project extend beyond the hospital building itself. The project also provides for important supporting infrastructure, including upgrades to the Haydon Drive intersections, the delivery of more than 700 additional car parking spaces and a new 100-place childcare centre that will replace and expand the current facility.

Importantly, the government is taking a carefully staged approach to delivery. This will allow existing hospital services to continue operating while new infrastructure is brought online, ensuring continuity of care for patients and a smooth transition to the future hospital environment. Once the new Clinical Services Building is completed, the aging Marian, Xavier and existing ICU buildings will be vacated, enabling a significant transformation of the North Canberra Hospital campus.

Critical planning and early design work have now been completed. Early works are already underway and the community will soon get their first look at artists' impressions for the new hospital. Major construction is expected to commence in 2027-28. This project has been shaped through extensive engagement with clinicians, consumer representatives, advocacy organisations, traditional custodians and the wider community. Their involvement has ensured that the new hospital reflects the needs and expectations of those who will use it every day.

The Canberra Hospital remains the territory's largest and busiest public hospital and, through the Canberra Hospital Master Plan, the ACT government is continuing to optimise the campus to support growing demand for health services. As part of the masterplan, the government has committed to more parking at Canberra Hospital, with

work underway for additional staff car parking facilities ahead of the multi-storey car park as part of ongoing master planning. As part of this work, interim car park expansions are progressing on the old helipad and at the former CIT site, making better use of existing hospital infrastructure while improving access and convenience for patients, visitors and healthcare workers. A development application to progress this work has been submitted and is expected to be approved soon. If successful, construction could commence by late 2026. This practical improvement will help support the day-to-day operation of the hospital campus as the ACT government continues to invest in modern, accessible healthcare facilities for Canberra's growing population.

While hospitals play a critical role in our healthcare system, we know that improving health outcomes also requires care closer to where people live, helping to keep people out of hospital where possible. This is why the ACT government continues to expand its network of community health centres, providing more accessible services and helping ensure people receive care in the most appropriate setting.

Earlier this month, the government marked an important milestone, with the completion of construction of the South Tuggeranong Health Centre. I had the privilege of visiting the centre and can confirm it looks fantastic. The centre is designed as a flexible space so it can adapt as community needs change over time, and includes modern, clinical spaces, a sustainable, energy-efficient design and a welcoming and accessible layout for all visitors. Once operational, the centre will host a range of community-focused services, including paediatric care, pathology collection, diabetes clinics, falls and injury prevention programs and chronic disease management services.

As the South Tuggeranong Health Centre moves into its operational commissioning phase, planning for the next of our health centres, the Inner South Health Centre in Griffith, is well underway. I was pleased to drop in to the community pop-ups that Infrastructure Canberra hosted at the Griffith and Narrabundah shops a few weeks ago to gather community feedback on the design of the centre. Around 250 people attended the pop-ups, and their comments will help inform the development application ahead of construction starting next year.

The ACT government is also continuing to provide children and young people in the ACT with a quality education close to home. We are committed to ensuring public education can be an excellent first choice for every family. Infrastructure Canberra, in partnership with the Education Directorate, is delivering on the government's significant investment to build and upgrade public schools. This investment will deliver new schools and will modernise and expand existing ACT public schools. As part of this commitment, the ACT government is investing in the expansion and modernisation of Telopea Park School, and I am pleased to have released the listening report on pre-DA engagement for this project today. It was great to see the community support and recognition of the benefits this modernisation project will deliver for the school and the wider inner south community.

The government's investment in education infrastructure projects like this demonstrates our commitment to accommodating future growth and supporting quality learning environments across Canberra. New schools are designed and built according to universal design principles, to deliver learning environments that meet the needs of all

people to the greatest extent possible. This includes flexible internal and external environments to accommodate a range of uses.

One of the most significant milestones this year has been the stage one opening of a new public primary school in Strathnairn. I would like to thank principal Nicole Nicholson and the entire Strathnairn School staff for their work and support in ensuring this milestone was realised. Located in the rapidly-growing Ginninderry region, Strathnairn School welcomed its first cohort of students from preschool to year 2 at the start of the 2026 school year. The Early Childhood Education and Care centre then opened on 20 April. Strathnairn School has inclusive classrooms, specialist learning areas and outdoor spaces, which are inspired by the natural surroundings of Ginninderry. Stage 2 will provide more indoor and outdoor learning spaces, the canteen, school hall and additional learning spaces, and is expected to be completed by the end of 2026. Minor final works will be completed early next year.

Providing an inclusive learning environment recognises that, when children feel truly safe and supported, they have the confidence to achieve success, whatever that might look like in their unique learning journey. I am proud of the school's commitment to inclusivity in its design. The school, which is 100 per cent electric, has also been designed with sustainability, accessibility and community use in mind, allowing it to serve the growing Ginninderry community for many years to come.

In the Molonglo Valley, our 94th public school, Whitlam School, is currently under construction. Whitlam School will provide high-quality public education closer to home for families in one of Canberra's fastest-growing regions. The ACT government has invested almost $102 million in stage 1 of the project, which will cater for up to 780 students from preschool to year 6 and include contemporary learning environments, specialist teaching spaces, a double gymnasium and facilities for community use. Supported by the inaugural principal, Felicity Levett, and her team, the school is expected to welcome its first cohort of students in 2027. It was a great pleasure to meet two of the incoming first graders—Samreen and Hargun—when the school's logo was unveiled in September.

The ACT government has also committed $36.7 million to deliver stage 2 of the project, including a co-located 130-place early childhood education and care centre. This centre has been supported by a $10 million contribution from the Australian government through the Building Early Education Fund, helping expand access to high-quality early learning for families in one of Canberra's fastest-growing suburbs. I had the privilege of visiting the site on Monday with the federal Minister for Early Childhood Education, the Senator the Hon Jess Walsh, and it was clear how important it will be to have this co-located, not-for-profit early learning centre supporting Molonglo Valley families.

In Woden, the ACT government's more than $100 million investment in the major expansion and modernisation of Garran Primary School continues to transform one of Canberra's most established school communities. Stage 1 was completed in December 2025, delivering new learning environments, specialised teaching spaces that can be accessed by the whole school, as well as a modern preschool. More recently, students have begun enjoying new futsal courts and play areas, with additional parking delivered as part of the second stage of works. A new double gymnasium, hard courts and additional outdoor learning and play spaces are expected to open in February 2027,

completing the project and creating a contemporary, inclusive campus capable of supporting more than 900 students into the future.

At Narrabundah College, another major modernisation project is nearing completion centred on the new Design, Arts, Technology and Science Building. Narrabundah College has been part of the community since 1974, and the government's almost $32 million investment will deliver new, purpose-built learning spaces for the school. With only final ancillary works remaining, the purpose-built facility will provide contemporary learning environments that support excellence in design, the arts, science and technology, positioning students for success in further education and future careers. Students and staff will begin using the upgraded facilities from the start of the 2027 school year, marking an important milestone for Narrabundah College.

As I mentioned earlier, the ACT government is also investing $53 million to expand Telopea Park School's senior campus to meet growing demand for public secondary education in Canberra's inner south. A significant milestone was recently achieved with the approval of the major plan amendment, which paves the way for the next stages of planning and design for the future expansion of the school. The project will deliver new general and specialist learning spaces, a multi-purpose hall with a double gymnasium, new landscaped areas and parking, providing high-quality facilities that will support students while also creating valuable community infrastructure for use outside school hours.

In Canberra's north, work is now underway on the ACT government's $124 million second public college for Gungahlin, located in Nicholls. Site clearing, earthworks and the installation of in-ground services are now underway as the project starts to take shape. The new college will initially accommodate 800 year 11 and 12 students, with capacity to expand as the region continues to grow. It will feature modern learning environments, a performing arts theatre, gym, sports facilities and community spaces available for use outside school hours. Scheduled to open for term 1, 2029, the college will play a critical role in meeting the senior secondary educational needs of one of Australia's fastest-growing regions. Importantly, the new college will also address community demand in Gungahlin for access to arts and sports facilities for the community to use outside of school hours.

At Majura Primary School, a staged modernisation program is underway to ensure students can continue to access high-quality education, with modern facilities that will provide enhanced teaching, learning and wellbeing. This $20 million investment will meet the learning and teaching needs of students and staff at this well-loved Watson school. Importantly, extensive community consultation helped identify modernisation priorities, which are starting to be delivered. A milestone was recently achieved with the appointment of a contractor to deliver a new, larger school library and learning space as well as refurbishing the existing library to create new administration facilities for staff. The broader project includes classroom upgrades, improved heating, ventilation and cooling systems, bathroom refurbishments, accessibility improvements and other targeted upgrades.

Beyond these major capital projects, the ACT government continues to invest in other improvements across the public school network to enhance learning environments, sustainability and student comfort. This includes heating and cooling upgrades through

the Electrification of Government Gas Assets Program and the Public Schools Heating and Cooling Fund, supporting more sustainable, energy-efficient schools. The Education Directorate, with the support of Infrastructure Canberra, is also delivering a range of more minor but equally important school improvement projects across Canberra, including roof replacements at Charnwood-Dunlop School and Dickson College, refurbishment of the Lyneham High School gym and heating and cooling upgrades at schools including Weetangera Primary, Latham Primary, Hawker Primary and Wanniassa Hills Primary.

Most importantly, this work is about creating safe, inclusive, sustainable and fit-for-purpose spaces for teaching and learning. These projects demonstrate the government's ongoing commitment to investing in the future of public education. From new schools in our growing suburbs to expansions and modernisations of existing campuses, these investments are ensuring students from across Canberra have access to modern, inclusive and sustainable learning environments closer to home.

In closing, I acknowledge the project teams, school leaders, staff, students, families, contractors and delivery partners, whose expertise, patience and collaboration are helping us build and modernise public schools to serve Canberra's communities for many years to come. The ACT government remains committed to building a stronger, more connected community through investment in world-class health and education services. By delivering modern hospitals, community health centres, schools and learning spaces, we are ensuring Canberrans have access to the care, education and opportunities they need, close to home. These investments will support our growing population, strengthen community wellbeing and help ensure Canberra remains a great place to live, learn, work and thrive for generations to come.

I present the following paper:

> Capital Project Update—Ministerial statement, 29 October 2026.

I move:

> That the Assembly take note of the paper.

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (10.43): I thank the minister for the update on some of our capital projects. There is some really useful progress in there and some great information about how things are tracking. I am concerned about some of our schools and I am concerned about the birthing facilities that we will be offering women and birthing people in Canberra in the new hospital.

To recap, for decades, women and birthing people have been asking for a freestanding birth centre. We had in recent years thousands of people involved in that campaign who asked for a freestanding birth centre, and the government agreed to conduct a feasibility study into a freestanding birth centre. The government did that work. They did consultation and they conducted a feasibility study. That feasibility study came back and made some recommendations about how to do a genuinely freestanding birth centre that was not connected to a hospital building.

In the designs, and what the minister has confirmed in this statement, right this second,

under our existing facilities, we have eight beds in which women and birthing people can give birth. Two of those are in a birth centre model and six are more regular hospital beds, but they are eight beds inside the hospital. What the minister has announced that we will get in the new hospital is eight beds inside the hospital. Some of those beds will have access by a different door, but they will still be inside the hospital.

Personally, I think we should be providing women and birthing people with a freestanding birth centre, because they have asked for that and it is great to let women have choices over where they give birth. It is part of women's bodily autonomy, the same way that we recognise women's bodily autonomy in many, many different ways in this state—and I am really proud that we do that. We are not giving them that option in these plans. The last time I asked about this issue, the minister said that lots of things were under consideration. I have not heard any update, and it sounds like what women and birthing people in Canberra will have after that decades-long campaign and that petition and that feasibility study is what they have now: eight beds inside the building of the hospital.

I am also concerned about not just the place of birth but also the model of care. It is excellent that the government is committed to expanding midwifery continuity of care. The target by 2028 is 50 per cent of women and birthing people should be offered midwifery-led continuity of care—they should be offered a midwife for the entirety of their pregnancy and birthing experience and postpartum. At the moment, we are tracking at 20 per cent—and it is 2026.

So I am concerned about both issues. I think it is going to be extremely difficult for the people of Canberra to understand how eight beds inside a hospital building is the freestanding birth centre that they asked for. This can still be turned around. The minister and government, if they chose, could put an actual disconnected birth centre elsewhere in a future phase of that hospital or there could be a community- based one—which was actually what the original calls were for. So there are still ways to deliver on this call. If the government does not wish to deliver on this call, I think it is better to describe it accurately as simply reproducing what we have now rather than describing it as providing a standalone birth centre when it is in actual fact the same number of beds inside a hospital that we currently have. It is not an expansion and it is not standalone.

In terms of our schools, it is really good to hear that we are expanding our schools' capacity—Canberra has a rapidly-growing population—but I am concerned about how some of these projects are rolling out. I have asked a lot of questions on this and I want to acknowledge that Mr Cain also lodged a very useful question on notice on this, and I have used some of that information in this. We have a number of schools that are running over budget. I think projects running a little bit over budget on major complicated capital works projects is quite understandable to people. Some of these projects are running double the original budget, and I am finding this difficult to understand. Strathnairn is the best example. The announcement for that project was $45 million. The approved budget was $62 million. According to Infrastructure Canberra's website, the cost of the project at the moment is $125 million. It is now double the budget. That is a very big budget overrun. It is also late, and we have seen this in the media reports. It is not yet fully opened; it is partially opened—it is partially opened one year later than it was intended to.

We have heard some explanations about those development and planning delays and environmental zone delays. All of these elements are part of the project that is run by government, by Infrastructure Canberra. It is hard to understand why the project is one year late and what the new features were that were not known. It is harder for me to understand why an approved budget of $62 million is now $125 million and counting. We see in the recent question on notice answer that that cost is not yet finalised, because the project is not finalised. So I do not know what the final cost will be.

Did the government massively underestimate that cost at the start? When that project was procured, what was the procurement price? What was the contracted price? If the contractor is coming back and asking for more money, why is that, and why is the government paying more money? If somebody has bid for a project on a certain price and then delivers it for double the price that they bid for, that gives us concerns both about how the project is being managed and about the territory's resources, the territory's money. In a procurement, if somebody bids one price and then ends up getting paid a different one, that gives us all sorts of concerns about the procurement. So there is actually a lot of information that I think we need to have flushed out about that particular school.

But we have a number of other schools that are running over budget. Aunty Agnes in Garran is also over budget. Similarly, we need to know that these projects are being done well. We need clear and specific reasons as to why they are over budget. It would be good to track through what has happened with the project management and the procurement of those that has led to that outcome. I have a number of questions. I will be seeking a briefing on this, and I am looking forward to getting some more information in annual reports.

MS TOUGH (Brindabella—Minister for Human Rights, Minister for Community Services, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Women, Seniors and Veterans, and Minister for the Prevention of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence) (10.51): I just could not let this go past today, and I wanted to start by saying: Ms Clay, I really do respect you, but we do have a difference of opinion on this. I mostly have let it go, but I just cannot today. It comes from my place of birth trauma. When we talk about the standalone birth centre, I have to agree with my colleague, the Minister for Health Infrastructure and all the work she has done as Minister for Health, about having a birth centre that is attached to the hospital so that, if something goes wrong, which it can, someone is in the hospital as quickly as possible.

I am really fortunate that, with what is wrong with me, what could have gone wrong when I gave birth, did not go wrong. I had a one-in-four chance of not surviving birth. I was told while pregnant that, if I had given birth in John James Hospital in Deakin and what is wrong went wrong, I would not have been alive to make it to intensive care at Canberra Hospital. We know that is a really short distance, but I would not have survived the loading onto an ambulance and making it to Canberra Hospital. So I gave birth in Canberra Hospital. I agree with you, Ms Clay, that there is a lot we can do for maternity services. I would be the first to say that I did not have the greatest experience in my labour and delivery experience in Canberra Hospital. I have worked through that, and I have a copy of my notes. The minister has heard my birth story a few times and so have many of my colleagues. One of the reasons that women's health means so much

to me is because of what I went through in pregnancy and in giving birth and then my stay in the Canberra Hospital afterwards.

It is so important for women to have choice and for women's bodily autonomy to be respected. But I just want people to be mindful that there sometimes comes a point in pregnancy and in birth where things can go really wrong—and they can go really wrong really quickly. Having access to a surgical suite, having access to intensive care, and being as close as physically possible while still respecting a woman's autonomy while going through labour and delivery, are some of the considerations that go into designs of where birth centres are and where birth suites are and how this is designed in our health systems. Thank you for indulging me.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Crime—reducing recidivism
Ministerial statement

MS CHEYNE (Ginninderra—Manager of Government Business, Attorney-General, Minister for City and Government Services, and Minister for Transport) (10.53): Today I table the ACT government's Reducing Recidivism 25 by 25 Annual Progress Report 2026, which marks the conclusion of the ACT's six-year recidivism reduction initiative. Reducing recidivism, where fewer people return to offending and fewer people become victims of crime, is one of the most difficult objectives facing any justice system, and it is one of the most important. The factors that contribute to offending and reoffending are complex and deeply interconnected. They include housing insecurity, trauma, family violence, poor health, mental ill-health, substance dependence, educational disadvantage and social exclusion. Accordingly, there are no simple solutions.

When the RR25by25 strategy was launched in 2020, it was clear that it was not intended to be a public relations exercise; rather, it was an effort to determine whether government action was making a meaningful difference and to build a stronger understanding of what works. To focus attention on those actions, it included an ambitious goal: to reduce recidivism by 25 per cent by 2025. Specifically, this headline indicator is an adult corrections measure—one which records the proportion of adults released from sentenced imprisonment who return to custody under a new sentence within two years. The strategy sought to reduce that rate from a baseline of 42.4 per cent to 31.7 per cent.

The latest result is 33.5 per cent, compared with 37.1 per cent in the preceding reporting year. That movement is encouraging. However, because there have been changes to Corrections systems and methodology, there is a break in the data series. So the latest result cannot be used to determine conclusively whether the original target, measured from the 2018-19 baseline, has been achieved, and, because the indicator operates with a two-year lag, a further result relating to releases during the final year of the initiative will become available in 2026-27. The government will publish that result, together with a clear explanation of the methodological limitations affecting comparison with the original baseline.

With the conclusion of this initiative, it is useful to reflect on what it has achieved in the context of that ambitious target. It has helped establish stronger data, stronger

partnerships and a clearer understanding of the factors that contribute to contact and repeated contact with the justice system. With reducing offending, reoffending and victimisation, enduring responsibilities of government, this initiative has given us more and better evidence of what we need to do than ever before. This includes three major pieces of research commissioned through the initiative, which I am pleased to release. Together, these reports examine patterns of offending and criminal justice system contact in the ACT, pathways out of the criminal justice system and evidence-based approaches to reducing recidivism drawn from Australian and international experience.

Collectively, they represent one of the most substantial bodies of research ever assembled in the ACT on offending, reoffending and desistance. They paint a stark picture of just how closely connected reoffending is to broader issues of child and family wellbeing, housing, health, education, employment, social inclusion and community connection. They provide a valuable insight into how people become involved in the criminal justice system, what supports them to move away from offending and the barriers that can prevent that change. The evidence consistently reinforces the importance of early intervention, diversion, family support, education, stable housing, health services and those strong community connections.

One of the clearest lessons emerging from this work is that adult recidivism is often the result of long-standing disadvantage and earlier justice system contact. That tells us that some of the most important long-term community safety interventions occur well before a person enters an adult prison or appears before an adult court. The interconnectedness of criminogenic factors and factors that lead to recidivism is precisely reason why the government has a renewed focus on ensuring that the objective of reducing recidivism and contact with the justice system is not standalone but, rather, is embedded in established justice, community and health reform frameworks. It is about recommitting to making this work part of our core business across government.

More specifically, that includes work under the ACT Youth Justice Strategic Plan, the Disability Justice Strategy, the ACT Housing Strategy and the co-development of the government's response to the review into the overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the ACT justice system, together with ongoing investment in rehabilitation, reintegration and continuity of care for adults leaving custody. These frameworks address the circumstances that most strongly influence justice outcomes, and they place responsibility within the parts of government best able to effect them. It is not about dispersing responsibility or making results less visible, but about recognising that a Corrections strategy alone cannot deliver the housing, health, education, employment, family support and community connection that the evidence shows are necessary.

With it apparent that we must address the circumstances that contribute to offending before they become entrenched, we will particularly increase and sustain our attention on children and young people at risk of justice system involvement. We must ensure that fewer children and young people enter the justice system in the first place. Investing early to address the causes of offending before they become entrenched in children and young people is paramount, and it will require investment, time, effort, and money in people, families and communities. This work must continue to also have the sustained attention and scrutiny of this Assembly and the broader community. Measurable targets being published and regularly reported against will continue to be a priority. Adult

recidivism indicators will continue to be publicly reported through the Justice and Community Safety Directorate's annual report, with increased timeliness and granularity. We will also strengthen justice data and evaluation, including through more detailed recidivism reporting, improved data on offending and bail outcomes, greater public access to justice data and considerations of options for linked justice datasets.

Finally, I want to draw attention to a finding that must be confronted directly. While the overall headline indicator of reducing recidivism demonstrated improvement—the limitations of that measurement notwithstanding—the rate at which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults returned to custody increased from 45.9 per cent to 55.9 per cent between the latest reporting periods. This is deeply concerning. While I appreciate that, overall, these are small numbers, the rate still demands our attention. An increase of this magnitude cannot be treated as a qualification to an otherwise improving overall result. It demands our specific attention and a response shaped by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It reinforces the continuing overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the justice system and the need for reform informed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership, knowledge and community-controlled responses.

Lasting reductions in offending and reoffending require culturally safe services, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led decision-making, stronger community control and earlier support for children, young people and families. The government's response must also be informed by the evolving understanding of justice reinvestment, with a stronger emphasis on self-determination, community leadership and reducing overrepresentation. We are very pleased with the partnership that we have with the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body, Aboriginal community-controlled organisations and other community partners, particularly through the co-development process underway to respond to the independent review into overrepresentation. It is only through the partnership that we will achieve system reform, community-led responses, investment priorities and arrangements for continuing accountability that work.

The legacy of this initiative is a stronger evidence base, better data and a clearer understanding that lasting reductions in offending depend on coordinated, culturally safe and community-based support, not on any single program or agency and not on a prison. I am pleased that this concerted effort will continue to inform government policy, direction and investment. I commend the report to the Assembly.

I present the following papers:

> RR25by25 Report 2026—Justice and Community Safety Directorate, dated October 2026.
> Reducing Recidivism Annual Progress Report 2026—Ministerial statement, 29 October 2026.

I move:

> That the Assembly take note of the ministerial statement.

MS BARRY (Ginninderra) (11.04): I thank the minister for her statement. Let me start by prefacing my following comments with the fact that I understand that the

Attorney-General has not been responsible for this program for the six years that it has been operating, so I can understand that some of the issues that are presenting, she probably would not have had the levers to pull to ensure that the program was on track or that it was delivering its set outcomes. Having said that, this government has had all of the levers for 25 years, so the buck still stops with them.

Mr Speaker, when a minister stands up and begins a speech by stating that the initiatives they are reporting on were not intended to be a public relations exercise, you know that what will follow and what they will say next is not going to make the government look particularly good. When the Attorney-General refers to the government's own 25 per cent reduction targets as "an ambitious goal", you know that they have most certainly missed the mark.

When I was reading the statement this morning, I was very enthusiastic, because I do believe that reducing recidivism is one way to ensure that people stop engaging with the criminal justice system and we have better justice outcomes. So I believe in the initiative. However, believing in the initiative is one thing; ensuring that you are funding things that support that initiative is another.

The government has told us today that after six years of trying to reduce recidivism in the ACT by 25 per cent, they still have not been able to do so. Their primary indicator was the number of adults released from custody who then returned to custody under a new sentence within two years, and while there have been some improvements, the government has not been able to get over the line. I am not surprised. The Attorney-General's statement today lines up with what we are hearing in the community, with what we are hearing on the ground.

I sometimes feel like a broken record, when I stand up here and I talk about crime and numbers, and I have done so in many speeches in this place. In recent weeks, we have heard about the teenager who was allegedly shot in a car, here in Canberra. We have heard reports of a young man who was allegedly stabbed after stepping out of his vehicle to confront a group that were throwing rocks at his car. We have heard and read of ACT Policing this year investigating eight shootings in the ACT, six of which I believe to be linked to a bikie gang. And that is before we have even touched on the level of youth crime in Canberra that is affecting small businesses and retail workers.

These individuals and these cases reflect what we are hearing from the ACT Victims of Crime Commissioner. We know that in the past year, the adult victims of crime register has increased by 35 per cent from the previous year. There has been a 123 per cent increase in the number of victims who have made submissions to the Sentence Administration Board—123 per cent, Mr Speaker. That is a significant number. All of that is to say that we are seeing headlines like this every other week, and we are seeing spikes in victims of crime. We are seeing a lot of offending, oftentimes by repeat offenders. It does not surprise me in the slightest when the government says that they have not been able to meet their recidivism reduction targets over the past six years.

But disappointingly, the Attorney-General has told us this morning that the government cannot even determine whether the latest results can conclusively determine whether the original target was reached, because changes to the corrections system and methodology have created a break in the data series. The question I have for the

government is: why has it continued this initiative if we cannot even measure the results? We have been told that next year we will receive a final result, but it will be accompanied by "a clear explanation of the methodological limitations affecting comparison with the original baseline".

Mr Speaker, it is hard not to hear this as just an excuse. Accepting that the government has not reached this target, I had hoped that the government would be able to tell us more after six years than what we already know. Of course, early intervention is needed. I strongly believe in early intervention. Of course, diversion is needed. Of course, family support, education, stable housing, health services and a strong sense of community support are needed. This is not a profound revelation. I read this; I was enthusiastic to see what progress we have made, and, sadly, I must say it was an anticlimax for me, because there was nothing in there that we did not already know.

But Mr Speaker, my greatest concern is that when you look at each of those pillars which support someone away from reoffending and re-incarceration—education, stable housing and good health—on each of those measures, the government's record is failing. Yesterday we heard that in education our children are probably some of the worst performing in the country. We have heard that our children are the worst performing in developmental indicators in the country. Those are all social determinants of crime.

The government has today delivered a bad report card on recidivism in the ACT, has made excuses for not achieving the target, and has turned around and made a series of generic statements about what it will go on to do in future to move the dial. You would think that if those commitments were sincere that they would have been implemented in the last six years while the initiative was on foot.

Finally, the government has told us today that one of the most vulnerable cohorts, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander offenders, have been returning to custody at considerably higher rates. A rate that has jumped from 45.9 per cent to 55.9 per cent is not a small margin. If I read the Attorney-General's statement correctly, that is an increase of 21 per cent on the last year's number. So to get this straight: the government sets up a reducing recidivism target by 25 per cent, and in the past year we have seen a 21 per cent increase in recidivism of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, who were the people who were over-represented in the criminal justice system in the first place, which means that the data is probably more terrible than is being reported.

I agree with the Attorney-General when she says that it is deeply concerning, but simply saying we will continue to work on it is not good enough. Yesterday I spoke in this space about a safe home that was taken from the First Nations community without a replacement. I did go out there to see some of the residents who would normally use that safe house, and one of the attendants there said to me:

> Some of some of these women are very vulnerable. They have been incarcerated; they have come out and they are doing well. Now we have lost track of them. We do not know where they are. We do not know what to do.

So when the government stands up and says, "We are committed to doing something"—that is one thing you could have done that could potentially have prevented someone else vulnerable, especially in the First Nations community, from returning to custody.

The government does not know how to intervene early in the lives of offenders. It does not know how to divert and support offenders away from a life of crime, and it should come as no surprise to us that this is the case.

Last week I moved a motion here calling on the government to complete an independent, holistic review of sentencing in the ACT, which would have included a detailed consideration of the effectiveness of Canberra's rehabilitation facilities, but the government turned their backs and gutted that out of my motion, because it was apparently not needed. I think they realised that those statistics were going to be terrible if they actually looked, because, really, there are no rehabilitation facilities here in the ACT. It is tragically ironic that in less than a week the government itself has confirmed just how needed that review would be.

Lastly, Mr Speaker, I think the government should go past words on a page: a strategy will not reduce recidivism; a motherhood statement will not reduce recidivism. They need to commit, and committing to reducing recidivism is more than words on a page, they need to be committed to all of those social determinants of crime if they are really serious about reducing recidivism in the ACT. I commend the statement to the Assembly.

MS VASSAROTTI (Kurrajong) (11.13): Thank you to the Attorney-General for tabling this report on this very important issue for the territory. I want to add some additional comments and context about reducing recidivism targets and the work that has been done to progress the ACT towards meeting this target. The Greens have always championed this work. The whole concept of reducing recidivism means thinking differently about how we use imprisonment in the ACT. It means embedding the evidence-based principle that we cannot keep building larger and larger prisons in the hope that this will simply deal with the issue of rising imprisonment rates. That does not work for anyone.

Counter to the common law-and-order "lock them up" narrative, it is actually these targeted programs and justice reinvestment initiatives that achieve better results for everyone and a safer community. Reducing the rate of recidivism is a key indicator to show that the justice system and our system of community support is tackling the underlying causes of crime. It is from this concept that the Greens have for many years championed the key strategy of justice called "Building Communities, Not Prisons".

The target of reducing recidivism rates by 25 per cent by 2025 was, in fact, an outcome of the Greens parliamentary agreement with the Labor Party in 2016 and stemmed from Greens policies and election commitments. The subsequent work resulted in a range of specific policies, programs and investments over the last decade that have resulted in the many positive outcomes the Attorney-General has discussed today. This commenced with the Justice Reinvestment Strategy and the Building Communities, Not Prisons program. In 2020 the program was expanded into the plan for reducing recidivism in the ACT by 25 per cent by 2025.

Between 2019 and 2024, the government invested over $115 million to dedicated justice reinvestment initiatives, supporting programs such as the drug and alcohol court, another Greens election initiative and parliamentary agreement item that has not only

helped turn around people's lives but even produced a positive cost-benefit ratio and saving of government money. The KPMG review of the drug and alcohol court shows that in 2022 and 2023 it saved nearly $10 million per year in avoided costs of custody, reduced recidivism and avoided costs of crime, outstripping the costs of the court itself.

These initiatives resulted in a 20 per cent reduction in recidivism by 2024. The most recent data, however, as the Attorney-General has outlined, shows that the government has not met this 25 per cent reduction target, and particularly concerning is that recidivism and incarceration rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are increasing. And as we have noted, the recidivism rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have increased.

The level of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander over-representation in the ACT has also grown significantly, by 27 per cent since 2017. It is much higher than the national average and it is the highest in Australia. Nearly nine in 10 First Nations men in prison in the ACT have been previously imprisoned. This is a real tragedy and a real failure. It is occurring despite the declared government commitment to reducing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander over-representation.

Now, I need to make the point that in this new term of government, the Labor government, it is clear that reducing recidivism and achieving this 25 per cent reduction target has not had the same priority. There has been a clear pattern of the government deprioritising and excising policies and programs that were championed by the Greens, even when these policies are successful, evidence-based and good for the community.

I am not suggesting that it is easy to reduce recidivism. This is one of the most complicated and challenging issues for a government to tackle. Investment is needed right across the justice and human services system—investments such as housing, and especially Justice Housing for people in the justice system who need stable accommodation; early intervention programs; bail support; and appropriate laws that prioritise rehabilitation instead of punitive approaches.

The government needs to prioritise and fund these solutions, such as those that were made clear in the Jumbunna report and the *Our Booris, our way* report. Some fairly simple recommendations, for example, have been recommended numerous times through committees, through reports, but still have not been acted on by government. Just one example: funding an Aboriginal bail support program for young people—recommended numerous times but never implemented. So what we have is a system that still fails in many ways to effectively lift people out of the cycle of incarceration. Instead, it manages these people in the justice system, at great cost.

The most recent data shows that the average cost of housing a detainee at AMC is almost $600 per day, per detainee. That is over $200,000 per year. Consider the fact that almost half of the people in the AMC are actually there on remand. That is 46 per cent. These are people who are not convicted or sentenced but are awaiting access to a trial. Adding to the concern is the fact that the average time a person spends in remand in the AMC is 173 days, or approximately six months—six months on average in the AMC, without even being convicted. And as we know, incarceration is a criminogenic factor that makes it even more likely that people will later reoffend.

We have a strong evidence base and a strong plan for reducing recidivism. This is an issue that needs to be a higher priority for government. I believe we are seeing a failure by government to prioritise justice investment and invest accordingly. We only need to look at recent budgets to see this. It is the same pattern that we have seen in the climate change space with the failure by government to meet its 2025 emissions reduction target.

I will again just emphasise that I recognise how challenging this issue is. I want to congratulate the many people working in the justice system and in various parts of government who are dedicated to improving outcomes and achieving this recidivism target. As I said, my call is that government needs to elevate the reducing recidivism goal and make it a true and well-funded priority of government.

Lastly, I do want to congratulate the government, the minister, the Attorney-General and the directorate for the excellent work that has been done in the provided report in terms of transparency and the provision of data. Despite the fact that the data in the report invites criticism in particular areas and, of course, criticism for not achieving the overall goal, it is excellent that this level of reporting and transparency has been supported in government.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (11.20): I wanted to welcome the Attorney-General's statement this morning on the ACT government's commitments to continue reducing recidivism here in the ACT. It is encouraging to see that overall recidivism has reduced, although not by as much as had been intended. We hear a lot of concerns from our community and here in the Assembly about crime and about community safety. Of course, reducing recidivism is at the core of resolving those concerns.

I echo the Attorney-General's acknowledgement that solution requires a comprehensive cross-portfolio approach, as well as established evidence that focusing solely on justice and corrections will not bring about the results we are seeking. Our housing, health, education and community services need to be working holistically to provide the wraparound supports that are needed to tackle cycles of disadvantage, poverty and crime and to address the underlying conditions required for Canberrans who have had previous engagements with the criminal justice system not to return to that system.

While I welcome the government's stance on this, the approach that has been taken so far clearly needs to change, because while recidivism has gone down on the whole, for our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population it increased by 10 percentage points in the last reporting period alone. These are shameful figures in the most progressive jurisdiction in the country, the only jurisdiction to have voted yes in the Voice to Parliament referendum. The Attorney-General commented that an increase of this magnitude cannot be treated as a qualification to an otherwise improving overall result, which I agree with. She also said that this demands specific attention and response, shaped by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Not only is reducing recidivism a target under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, but it is the obligation of government to ensure that co-design and self-determination is a priority reform area, which too often it has failed to be upheld.

That is certainly a concern that is raised constantly with me in my office by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Canberrans, who feel that still consultation is often a box-ticking exercise, looping in First Nations community members and Aboriginal

community-controlled organisations only after the key decisions have been made, when significant constraints have already been established to frame their input, rather than being a good-faith implementation of the government's Closing the Gap commitments to self-determination and genuine co-design and genuine shared decision-making.

In the ACT an Aboriginal child is 12.5 times more likely to be in out-of-home care than a non-Indigenous child. An Aboriginal young person is 14.8 times more likely to be in youth detention than a non-Indigenous young person. An Aboriginal adult is 25.4 times more likely to be incarcerated than a non-Indigenous adult—the largest gap in the country. The ACT government, we know, is failing to support some of our most at-risk and disadvantaged community members, who are then stuck in a pipeline they have no control over. The government removes First Nations children from their parents at far higher rates, detains First Nations young people at far higher rates and imprisons First Nations adults at far higher rates. What we have heard this morning is that the First Nations people who have been incarcerated are then significantly more likely to end up back there post release than non-Indigenous detainees and that that gap is widening.

What is going on here? We need to turn this around. That starts with listening to First Nations voices when they tell us about how best to do that and providing sufficient funding to Aboriginal community-controlled organisations that are ready to step up and lead the implementation of these solutions. Again, I welcome the government's recognition that system-wide change is needed, not just to our justice system but to our social service and support systems more broadly.

I note that, courtesy of a motion I brought to this Assembly 18 months ago—I appreciate the Assembly's support for it—the government is on the brink of finally launching a board of inquiry into Aboriginal deaths in custody here in the ACT which will consider the various conditions that may be contributing to recidivism, including the treatment and experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander detainees in the AMC, the adequacy and implementation of cultural safety policies and the availability and effectiveness of rehabilitative educational and cultural programs. I trust the government will truly centre Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their voices in how this inquiry is run and how it is responded to thereafter so that the findings from this board of inquiry can contribute to the government's response to this alarming recidivism trajectory.

As I have said to multiple ministers now, I am keen to be a part of this body of work, and I have signalled this to the new Minister for Corrections in our conversations since she took on the portfolio. I have welcomed her positive response to that, and the same goes for the former Minister for Corrections. I look forward to engaging also with the Attorney-General and with all relevant ministers as this work progresses.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Education, Minister for Child Development and Wellbeing, Minister for Finance, Minister for the Public Service, and Minister for Health Infrastructure) (11.26): I was not intending to speak, but I cannot let Ms Vassarotti's comments go without response. I think it is really important to recognise that pretty much the entire period of data on which Ms Cheyne was reporting is a period during which Greens ministers held key justice portfolios. Mr Rattenbury was the Minister for Corrections for two terms, there was a brief break and then it was Minister Davidson. Minister Rattenbury was

Attorney-General for the entirety of the last term of parliament. Minister Davidson was the minister with responsibility for youth justice.

Ms Vassarotti, for example, talked about youth justice bail support and how that had not been introduced. That had not been reintroduced during the period because, actually, Labor ministers had previously had a bail support program for young people alleged offenders. Ms Davidson did not develop a new youth justice strategy, which Mr Pettersson has, and did not reintroduce a youth justice bail support program.

Mr Rattenbury, as the Attorney-General, took three years to deliver on the ACT Labor election commitment in the 2020 election to undertake a review into the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the justice system. That was an ACT Labor commitment in the 2020 election, which I spent three years as Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs nagging the then Attorney-General to get cracking with, knowing that we had the funding available to do that.

This is a challenging situation. I recognise that the Greens also delivered significant justice reinvestment policies with the support of ACT Labor and that we were jointly committed to both reducing recidivism and ensuring there was additional early intervention and prevention support to prevent people coming in contact with the justice system or to ensure that they were diverted from the justice system as early as possible. I absolutely recognise that there are some continued significant challenges, particularly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in our community.

I am pleased to say that, investing with Aboriginal community-controlled organisations, we are seeing the transition finally of the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm towards Aboriginal community control and a residential program. We have seen the physical completion of Winnunga Nimmityjah's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander drug and alcohol rehabilitation service facility, and that will be opening in due course. That is a matter now for Winnunga, and we really welcome that. We have invested in ensuring that that program can get up and running, because we know that these changes cannot all be made in the context of corrections or the justice system.

I think the Greens' ongoing insistence of rewriting history and failing to take responsibility and recognise the complexity that their own ministers were in many cases unable to address is really problematic for their credibility in this place. These are hard issues. I am not saying that previous ministers were not trying; of course they were. Current ministers also are working really hard and are delivering positive changes for our community. It is not okay to rewrite history to say the Greens have always delivered positive results and Labor is walking away from those. Neither of those things is true. Part of doing politics differently should involve being honest about the challenges that ministers face, no matter which party they come from.

DR PATERSON (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services, and Minister for Gaming Reform) (11.31): I just wanted to add to the debate in terms of the significant investment and focus on our young people who come in contact with our justice system. I highlight, from the Attorney-General's statement, the government's very sustained focus on young people over the last few years. I also want to mention the Inspector of

Custodial Services and the healthy prison review that was released last year, which highlighted that many young people, in terms of aged 18 to 25, that are within AMC have also had contact with the justice system as young people.

I want to commend Minister Pettersson for his delivery of the youth justice strategy only a couple of months ago. Again, it maps out the plan for the government with a really sustained focus on young people in our system. This is complemented by the raising the age of criminal responsibility reforms that the government has implemented over the past few years. These are absolutely nation-leading reforms.

I remain very, very committed to ensuring that we take a therapeutic approach to supporting young people who may come into contact with our system and also to supporting the Therapeutic Support Panel. They are an amazing group of people who are working with young people in our community who are facing very significant challenges and at risk of harm to themselves or harm to others. This panel works very closely with these young people in finding appropriate services to support them, given their specific challenges.

I also want to highlight the safer youth response program that works very closely with ACT Policing. They take referrals from ACT police of young people who make contact with police. I would like to thank them for the work that they do and their very important role and recognise that ACT Policing are very grateful for their service.

ACT police also have a very sustained focus on working with young people and reducing recidivist offending. ACT police have dedicated youth liaison officers within the community engagement team vulnerable persons portfolio. Through this capability, ACT police works closely with the ACT Education Directorate to provide safety-themed education programs and resources for young people. The youth liaison officers also engage with young people and schools on a referral basis in relation to criminal conduct, antisocial behaviour and other significant issues in their lives.

One of the other initiatives within ACT Policing that has won awards is the ROMART, the Recidivist Offender Multi-Agency Round Table. This is a fantastic initiative that is chaired by the proactive policing officer in charge and includes representatives from relevant ACT government agencies and organisations. It has a primary purpose of reducing recidivist offending in the ACT. ROMART is a case management body that meets weekly to manage high-risk, high-harm offenders and alternates each week between young people and adult offenders. It also enhances information sharing between participant agencies working with the recidivist offenders. Some of the membership of ROMART consists of ACT Policing; child, youth and family services, including the Therapeutic Support Panel; youth justice; and the ACT department of education. Cross-agency collaboration through ROMART has led to many positive results, including a young offender gaining employment post release, breaking the cycle of repeat offending. ROMART also offers a pathway to support and other programs, ensuring the best use of limited resources and program placements. This includes referrals to flexible education, which has high demand, and also referrals to the intensive adolescent service run by CYF.

I would also like to recognise the community service organisations that the ACT government partners with to deliver services for young people that may come into

contact with our justice system. I particularly acknowledge Ted Noffs and PCYC. I look forward to further announcements regarding evaluation of PCYC's P180 program, which is an amazing program that supports young people who are struggling in our community. It is a very intensive program that runs over a semester period where they work with these young people.

I just again wanted to restate the government's very sustained focus through the policy work and through investment on supporting young people who may come into contact with our justice system, which will ultimately have flow-on implications for reducing adult recidivism in our community.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

ACT Ambulance Service—update
Ministerial statement

DR PATERSON (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services, and Minister for Gaming Reform) (11.36): It is nearly 12 months since I announced the completion of the roster review for the ACT Ambulance Service, and today I want to update the Assembly and the Canberra community again of the progress that we have made, the challenges that remain and the work underway to support our paramedics.

The review found that the existing roster supports strong staff fatigue management principles and remains a credible model; however, its effectiveness has been constrained by pressures across the service and the sector. We have taken the review's recommendations seriously, engaging the staff, the union and the other key stakeholders to identify the changes needed to ensure that ACTAS has a workforce model that is sustainable and effective and responsive to community needs.

In March 2026, I tabled the ACT Ambulance Service Workforce Strategy, establishing a three-year framework focused on three priorities: roster sustainability; leave, governance and wellbeing; and recruitment, education and retention. The first of three action plans has now been completed. Its focus has been on stabilising the workforce and laying the foundations for long-term sustainability. It also establishes a clear framework for measuring progress, identifying pressure points and adjusting workforce settings as demand changes. Demand remains central to the challenges facing the ACT Ambulance Service. In 2025-26, ACTAS answered 74,000 emergency 000 calls, an 11 per cent increase on the previous financial year and the highest annual total on record. In the first quarter of this year, ACTAS answered a further 20,000 emergency 000 calls. This is another 12 per cent increase on the previous year, and demonstrates the scale of the demand for our ambulance service.

This year ACTAS has commenced quarterly reporting on staffing workload, operational resources and response performance. The most recent report for the period of July to December will be published on the ESA website shortly. The figures tell an important story about the pressures facing the service. Alongside the 20,000 emergency 000 calls in the most recent quarter, ACTAS has delivered over 12,000 emergency ambulance responses, transported 9,000 patients to emergency departments and provided over 9,000 virtual responses. The report also records more than 9,000

overtime hours across the relevant pay periods and 136 occasions where ambulance stations were unable to roster their usual complement of crews. These are significant demands on a workforce that is already working hard to care for our community. Despite these pressures, ACTAS maintained a median priority response time of 11.9 minutes, with 90 per cent of priority 1 cases receiving a response in 21 minutes. We should recognise that performance while also being honest about the pressure required to sustain it. It is worth noting that this reporting period covers winter, when community demand and staff personal leave both typically increase.

Like ambulance services around the world, ACTAS has been experiencing sustained pressures, and our paramedics and other staff feel the effects. Over time, that pressure begins to impact on workplace culture, fatigue and wellbeing. It is clear that, to effectively alleviate pressures, we need to continue to recruit and retain experienced paramedics, improve access to leave, reduce unnecessary reliance on overtime, support education and professional development and strengthen secondary triage and referral pathways. These changes will help ensure patients receive the right care while keeping frontline ambulances available for emergencies.

Above all, we must listen to our workforce. The concerns raised by staff, the union and the community have driven and informed our reviews, our reporting, the workforce strategy and the government's investment decisions. Our immediate priority is to grow the workforce. The government has funded an additional 23 paramedics in the last budget, including those positions. ACTAS is working towards a funded paramedic establishment of 302 full-time equivalent positions by 30 June next year. As at 30 September this year, the service had 268 full-time equivalent paramedics. Reaching the funded establishment will require recruiting a further 33 full-time equivalent paramedics, while also replacing any staff who leave the service during this period.

This is a substantial recruitment task, and we are pursuing several pathways to achieve it. Fourteen graduate paramedics commenced duties following the February course, with a further nine expected to commence duties following the course that began in July. The latest graduate recruitment process attracted 175 applications, with interviews anticipated over the coming weeks for commencement in 2027. ACTAS is also considering an increase in graduate intern numbers in 2027. Graduate paramedics undertake at least a year of supervised on-road practice alongside experienced mentors before achieving an independent authority to practise. That means recruitment must be matched by the education and mentoring capacity needed to support capable and confident paramedics.

We are also recruiting experienced paramedics, known as lateral recruits, who can make an immediate contribution to the workforce. Lateral recruits still require a supported transition into ACTAS, which generally takes around six weeks. Eight experienced recruits commenced a course in March, one in June and five in August. A fourth course is planned for November with four recruits, and ACTAS intends to run up to four lateral recruitment programs next year. International recruitment of experienced paramedics and graduates is also being explored, but is not yet an established recruitment program.

We recognise that growing the workforce is essential, but recruitment alone will not solve all of the challenges. We must also make our ACT Ambulance Service a place where experienced paramedics want to stay and where staff can balance the demands

of their work with their personal and family commitments. That includes improving access to leave, considering flexible work arrangements and ensuring paramedics have the clinical and wellbeing support they need. Current workforce pressures mean that planned leave must be carefully managed to support station coverage.

We recognise that a roster system may not suit every single individual. We are committed to listening to our workforce to understand where the key pressures are. ACTAS currently has 48 flexible work arrangements in place, which is approximately 18 per cent of the workforce. Of these, 26 exclude night shifts and 16 have reduced night shifts, creating complexity for night coverage and backfilling. These arrangements need to balance individual circumstances with the operational requirements of the service. We will continue working through these challenges with staff to support both workforce wellbeing and reliable ambulance coverage across the ACT.

Supporting the wellbeing of ACT paramedics remains a key priority for the government. We recognise that the single most important factor in improving workforce wellbeing is stabilising staffing levels and rosters, which is why our ongoing recruitment and workforce growth efforts are so critical. Alongside this work, ACTAS is progressing a range of initiatives to strengthen wellbeing support, including consideration of both immediate and longer-term opportunities to enhance wellbeing, leadership capability and support services for staff. This work will be informed by a recent ACTAS staff wellbeing survey.

Last month, a listening report from the survey was shared with ACTAS staff. I thank all paramedics who took the time to complete the survey and share their experiences and perspectives. It gives us the opportunity to progress work in this space in a tailored fashion and it will play an important role in shaping the future of wellbeing across ACTAS. The outcomes of the survey will figure in a new wellbeing guide which will be launched by ACTAS in the coming weeks. The ACTAS Chief Officer will also be participating in a National Emergency Worker Health Roundtable hosted by the Black Dog Institute, providing another opportunity to learn from national best practice and emerging research.

Keeping our paramedics safe at work is equally important. I am disappointed that occupational violence against our paramedics continues to occur. The majority of occupational violence incidents are perpetrated by the very clients that our dedicated ACTAS staff are trying to help. So let me be clear: violence, aggression and inappropriate behaviour towards our frontline workers is completely unacceptable. The ACT government has zero tolerance for this conduct. We are committed to doing everything we can to protect our staff and ensure they can perform their duties safely.

In July, ACTAS launched the Blended Learning Interactive Simulation Suite, which provides immersive training to help paramedics prepare for complex operational situations, including incidents involving occupational violence and aggression. The facility also provides a controlled environment to support recovery and return-to-work pathways following injury or other workplace challenges. This is a practical investment in the safety and wellbeing of our workforce. Next month, the government will launch an occupational violence campaign, reminding the ACT community that everyone has a role to play in keeping our frontline workers safe and ensuring they return home safely

to their families at the end of every shift. We understand that people may encounter paramedics during some of the most difficult and stressful moments of their lives. But distress is never an excuse for violence or aggression. Our paramedics do their job because they want to help. They deserve all of our respect and they deserve to feel safe while doing their jobs.

I also want to update the Assembly on the new Molonglo Station. This modern, fantastic facility will provide an important operational base to serve the whole territory, with a focus on the Molonglo Valley, Weston Creek and Woden Valley. The community's enthusiasm for the new station was evident at its open day last weekend, which attracted hundreds, if not thousands, of people. ACT Fire and Rescue has been responding from the Molonglo Station since 2 September. Consultation is continuing with staff and the Transport Workers Union regarding the commencement of ambulance operations from the facility. ACTAS is completing the operational commissioning process to test systems before progressively integrating the station into the ambulance network. The commencement of ambulance operations will be supported by the arrival of five new emergency ambulances, with deployment to Molonglo Station planned for December this year. This is an important investment in our emergency services infrastructure, and we are working through the necessary steps to ensure the ambulance service can operate from the facility safely and effectively.

The past 12 months have involved considerable work by ACTAS staff, the ESA's enabling services and the Chief Officer. Much of this work happens behind the scenes. I would like to assure our ACTAS paramedics that there are a lot of people working hard to support a service that can respond to growing demand and that support our frontline workforce to continue to deliver high-quality care to the community.

To provide further experienced and strategic advice, I intend to establish a ministerial ambulance service advisory panel. The panel will advise on current performance and sustainability of the ambulance service, monitor and provide feedback on the implementation of the ACTAS Workforce Strategy and identify opportunities to continuously improve the delivery of ambulance services across the territory. This will help ensure we maintain a focus on outcomes on the ground, accountability and the long-term sustainability of ACTAS.

Our paramedics are central to the safety and wellbeing of our community. From every conversation I have with our local paramedics, it is clear that they do their jobs because they care very deeply. They show up every day to help Canberrans when they need it most. They make very difficult decisions under pressure. I would like to assure our paramedics that the government's position is clear: we will continue to strengthen ACTAS, and we will do so by investing in its people, its capability and the systems that support them. You deserve a service that supports you, invests in your future and takes your concerns seriously. We are committed to strengthening ACTAS. We know there is more work to do, and we will continue working with staff, the union and the community to address the challenges facing the service. To the Canberra community: I want to reaffirm that our ambulance service is here for you when you need it most. While demand on our service is at the highest levels ever, the ACT has continued to deliver some of the best response times in the country for life-threatening cases and consistently records high levels of patient satisfaction.

I thank every ACTAS paramedic and staff member for your dedication, your professionalism and your commitment to caring for our community. Your work makes a real difference to people experiencing some of the most difficult moments of their lives, and you have our continued support.

I present the following paper:

> ACT Ambulance Service—Update on Progress—Ministerial statement, 29 October 2026.

I move:

> That the Assembly take note of the paper.

MRS MORRIS (Brindabella) (11.52): Canberrans should be able to trust that, when they call for an ambulance, help will arrive. The information that has been provided to this Assembly today is bitterly disappointing, because nearly 12 months on, Canberrans were entitled to see some meaningful progress on the extremely serious issues that were identified in the roster review. Instead, it seems like our ambulance service continues to operate on goodwill and a system that is held together by sticky tape. Station closures continue; the service remains dependent on thousands and thousands of overtime hours; and the new $66 million Molonglo Emergency Services Station was recently opened with much fanfare even though ACTAS does not have the staff to operate from it—a multi-million dollar emergency services station with no paramedics to staff it.

You just cannot make this up. Actually, I think you can make this stuff up, because I am pretty sure the creative producers of *Yes, Minister* did exactly that. They did just that in an episode of *Yes, Minister* when they had a brand new, empty hospital with no medical staff. So here we are in Canberra, under this government, with a multi-million-dollar emergency services station without any paramedics able to operate from it.

Following my motion last December, the Assembly directed the minister to take meaningful action on fixing the rostering crisis. As a result of the Canberra Liberals' motion the minister has been compelled to produce a workforce strategy, an action plan and quarterly reports, as featured in this statement today. The transparency that comes with these quarterly reports is very important. It is very important, because it has revealed that our ambulance services are no better off today than they were one year ago when we were discussing these issues. In fact, the June quarterly report records every night shift below minimum crewing and 178 hours of station closures. In addition, today, the minister reported 9,200 hours of overtime and 136 occasions where stations could not be adequately staffed in the latest quarter. So it is clear that this service is still struggling—it is deeply struggling—and it is being held together with scotch tape, with overtime and with the extraordinary commitment and goodwill of the staff.

Our paramedics are everyday heroes. They are driven by a deep sense of duty and professionalism to care for our community. Often that comes at great personal expense, not just to them but to their families too. They are routinely exposed to human trauma and suffering and are exposed to occupational violence. That is on top of the ordinary pressures that just come with undertaking the life-saving shift work that they do. Our paramedics should not have to carry the additional burden that comes with a

government's failure to adequately resource the service and make sure that they are looked after.

Paramedics have warned the Canberra Liberals that these shortages could result in serious patient harm. Paramedics have described the moral injury that they have knowing that they will struggle to reach someone who needs their care, because the resources are stretched so desperately thin. I am willing to bet that every single member in this place has received a story from a member of the community when they have made the call for help and have had to wait unbearably long hours to get that help because our service is stretched so thin.

Yet the government continues to hold the information that we need to test these concerns that paramedics have raised. Publishing overall response times and patient satisfaction figures does not tell us what happened to patients during those periods of understaffing and station closures. Were patients harmed? Were there near misses? These are questions that we have asked, and we have moved in this Assembly an order for the production of documents—and these are questions that this government refuses to answer. The Assembly cannot properly scrutinise these risks without the evidence that this government withholds. This lack of transparency is disgraceful. Our paramedics, who are going above and beyond to keep our community safe, and the community who relies on these services, deserve better.

I again thank our frontline workers for their professionalism, their compassion and their extraordinary commitment to service. They continue to deliver life-saving care under pressures that this government has failed to resolve. They deserve a government that matches their commitment with action.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Budget management system—order to table documents

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (11.58): I move:

> That:
>
> (1) in accordance with standing order 213A, the Assembly orders the Treasurer to provide the Assembly with a document or documents, drawn from or produced using information held in the ACT Government's Budget Management System, setting out a complete list of all Budget initiatives that currently have or have had funding attached to them since the establishment of the system in the 2017-2018 financial year;
>
> (2) the document or documents must:
>
> (a) be provided by the first sitting day of 2027;
>
> (b) be provided in an accessible electronic format, including a machine-readable spreadsheet, and must include for each Budget initiative:
>
> (i) the title of the initiative;
>
> (ii) the relevant directorate or agency;
>
> (iii) whether the initiative relates to expenses, capital, revenue, savings,

offsets or another category;

(iv) the budget, budget review, appropriation bill or other budget process in which the initiative was first introduced;

(v) whether the initiative is ongoing or non-ongoing;

(vi) if the initiative is non-ongoing, the financial year in which funding for the initiative is scheduled to end or ended; and

(vii) the amount of funding allocated to the initiative in each Budget and each year of the forward estimates period; and

(c) wherever relevant, show changes in appropriations that have occurred between each ACT Budget and the previous year's ACT Budget;

(3) for the purposes of this order:

(a) "budget initiative" includes any measure, initiative, commitment, revenue initiative, expense initiative, program initiative, election commitment or other funded decision recorded in the Budget Management System;

(b) "currently have or have had funding attached to them since the establishment of the system in the 2017-2018 financial year" means initiatives for which funding is or was allocated, reserved, approved, appropriated, transferred, reprofiled or otherwise recorded in the Budget Management System since the 2017-2018 financial year, current financial year or any year of the forward estimates;

(c) "funding" includes controlled recurrent payments, territorial payments, capital injections, capital works funding, expenses on behalf of the Territory, own-source revenue impacts, administered items, savings, offsets and any other financial allocation recorded against an initiative; and

(d) "changes" means the introduction of new budget initiatives, the cessation of previous budget initiatives and changes to the level of funding for each budget initiative relative to the previous Budget; and

(4) the list is to be provided at the most disaggregated initiative level available in the Budget Management System and must not be provided only as aggregated directorate, portfolio or output-class totals.

Let me start by apologising to my staff, because they have written a very good speech which I am going to gut on the fly in the interests of time today. I can only do so because of the way this Assembly has been able to work together to get something acceptable on the notice paper—that is my understanding—around a motion which is quite straightforward and quite sensible and which delivers better transparency for this Assembly and the community.

I thank members across the Assembly for the constructive way in which they have engaged. All non-executive members in this chamber understand how hard the budget is to interrogate. The information provided makes it impossible to trace the history of appropriations, how money moves around and what makes up the overall amount that ends up being appropriated. That is not, in my opinion, how things ought to be and is not in line with the intent of the Financial Management Act. This gets us closer to that intent. It will see the Assembly able to look at probably more information than it has seen before and be able to reconstruct what has happened over time to land us at the

position we are in today. By requiring the information to be provided at the most disaggregated initiative level available in the Budget Management System, rather than just broad directorate totals, the motion ensures that information will actually be useful.

This is also good for the government. Our budget is in shambles. Transparency demands discipline, and that discipline seems to have been pretty sorely lacking. It has been evident in just about every budget that I have witnessed, every piece of data and every news story. If you cannot follow the decisions that have been made over time and funding changes cannot be seen clearly, and, when the Assembly cannot compare one budget with another, the government has a pretty clear path. But, when you can, there is a stronger incentive for the government to be clear about what they are promising and be honest about what has changed and what has been cut.

Regardless of whether a budget decision is good or one that we agree with, this motion would enable the Assembly to actually have an informed debate. That is exactly how scrutiny should work, because budgets are ultimately about choices. They tell us what the government has chosen to prioritise and what it has deferred, and those choices should be open, visible and able to be scrutinised.

I thank members again, in particular those who reached out to engage on this—particularly representatives of the Treasurer's office and the Leader of the Greens' office, and Ms Carrick, who all sat down together to work through the final wording of this motion. The main changes that you will see compared with the original listed motion are that we have changed the timeframe to align with the implementation date of the current government GBMS and we have removed the requirement for ongoing provision. The reason for the second change is that I understand staff of the public service are not comfortable with orders for the production of documents that do not yet exist. I can understand that. All it means is that we will be moving something very similar next time around.

MR STEEL(Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage, and Minister for Sport and Recreation) (12.02): The government will not oppose the motion before the chamber today relating to budget initiatives. I acknowledge the resolution earlier this year, which the government responded to. We know that much of the information in that request will be included here as well. I understand and acknowledge the curiosity and interest of members of the Assembly in the territory's finances and the budget. I want to particularly acknowledge the hard work undertaken by Treasury—a very small team that has been diligently and professionally responding to numerous requests and requirements of the Assembly throughout the parliamentary term. I thank Mr Cocks for his openness on the change of scope to reflect the period of time the Government Budget Management System has actually been in place, which is since 2017-18.

The government reports extensively on all budget initiatives, changes and rollovers through the annual budget statements, our consolidated financial statements and the quarterly financial reports. This will continue and will be the most important way for members of the Assembly to scrutinise the budget and the fiscal position.

I want to touch on the fact that the government is currently drafting its response to the Assembly's inquiry into fiscal sustainability and note the request made there to improve

and change financial reporting. The government is diligently considering this and we will be providing a response in due course. I acknowledge the request for more detailed reporting, particularly by output or program. But I want to clarify that the reason this cannot be arranged for this matter is that it does not currently aggregate in that way in the system, and agencies' strategic indicators are structured separately in agency statements.

The government will comply with the order of the Assembly today. I look forward to the documents being produced.

MS CLAY(Ginninderra) (12.04): The Greens support this motion. I want to thank Mr Cocks for bringing it forward. I want to thank the Treasurer for his really helpful engagement and his office. We asked for a briefing for me, my office, Mr Cocks's office and Ms Carrick's office, and we got that joint briefing. I think that was a really helpful way forward, so everyone got the same information and we could all come up with a really constructive form of words.

Canberrans do deserve to know what their money has been promised to, what it has been spent on and what quietly stopped along the way. A budget tells us what we can afford. A really good budget should also tell us what our choices are achieving. We have worked with Mr Cocks and Ms Carrick on this issue in various forms, and I think we are all understanding that the ACT is facing real fiscal constraints. We cannot pretend debt carries no cost. Recurrent commitments do not finance themselves, and we are finding that every desirable project cannot be delivered at once.

The 26-27 budget forecast a headline net operating deficit of $323 million, and the fiscal sustainability committee reported serious concerns about the financial position, particularly debt for recurrent costs. These are reasons for greater discipline. They are not reasons for abandoning ambition. The fundamental question is not whether government should borrow more or should borrow less; it is what government should borrow for, what risks we accept and whether the community is receiving enduring value in return.

We need really, really clear questions before we are committing our money. What is the problem we are solving? What alternatives have we assessed? What does the evidence say about the expected benefits? What is the project going to cost over its entire life? What might go wrong? How do we know, five years later, whether that project succeeded? We should be learning from successes and from failures.

When a project succeeds, we should understand why and we should replicate what has worked. When it runs out of budget or it fails to deliver, we should investigate the causes. Was it optimistic forecasting? Was it poor procurement? Should we have scoped changes? Do we have a problem with our delivery capacity? Was it governance? I understand that is a difficult topic, but it is certainly one we have to address at the moment. Were there external shocks or new things that we did not know about at the time?

Learning requires records and consistent definitions, a certain degree of centralised knowledge and a willingness to publish all of those findings. Budget transparency is really important. The Treasurer is already publishing extensive budget papers, and the

government is already publishing extensive agency statements and financial information. This next opportunity is about making information easier to compare across years and across agencies and programs and letting us track some of those individual elements of projects and outputs. That could really help the Assembly compare budget promises with the results that we see on the ground. It could help us identify recurring cost pressures and help us track the performance of some of those major projects, some of which are being delivered really well, some of which are running a lot of a budget. It could help us distinguish what is a one-off shock from what is a structural and ongoing problem that needs to be addressed. That transparency also serves government. Good documentation will help incoming officials and the auditors and the agencies understand why decisions were made and what the outcomes of those decisions were. It reduces repeated work and mistakes and lessons being made in lots of different agencies but not shared across government.

Fiscal responsibility is not measured by how little we spend nor by how confidently we announce new projects; it is measured by whether we can demonstrate that our public resources are being used wisely and fairly sustainably and that we are providing the services and the projects that Canberrans need. Public money carries that public obligation to deliver the public benefit, to show the evidence and to build good budgeting. In periods when finances are tight, when we have such real pressures on health, education, housing, climate, the environment and infrastructure, all of our choices really matter. I thank Mr Cocks for bringing forward this motion, and the Greens will support this motion.

MS CARRICK(Murrumbidgee) (12.09): I raise concerns that the Treasury budget system contains information from the directorates at the trial balance level—that is, the balance sheet and operating statement level. To manage expenditure, we need visibility at a lower level. I hope fields will be put in the system to capture expenditure at least at the output level. With the absence of program-level information, perhaps the government could start analysing expenditure at the output level, as this is what is outlined in the budgets. It is not easy to determine where we can find savings, where we can reallocate funds and where expenditure can be moved and rationalised if we do not have the reporting and the visibility to understand it.

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (12.10), in reply: Very quickly in closing, I wanted to again thank everyone who has been involved in these discussions. I do want to explicitly acknowledge Ms Carrick's very reasonable requests around information going to program and, in the absence of program, output-level information. It was very surprising to me that we could not actually get that information from what is called the GBMS. That said, I would also like to acknowledge the government's willingness to work with us in finding some information about exactly what we can learn. I understand that they are working on a response to the fiscal committee's report, and I would certainly hope that that issue is thoroughly dealt with in that response.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Administration and Procedure—Standing Committee
Statement by chair

MR HANSON (Murrumbidgee) (12.10): Pursuant to standing order 246A I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Administration and Procedure.

Standing order 16 requires the committee in each term to inquire into and report on the operation of the standing orders and continuing resolutions of the Assembly with a view to ensuring that the practices and procedures of the Assembly remain relevant and reflect practice.

At its meeting on Monday 19 October 2026, the committee agreed to commence its review. The Committee has adopted the proposed timetable:
In early November the inquiry will be advertised in the press and the following parties be written to:

- all current Members
- former Chief Ministers and Speakers
- the Head of Service
- the Labor Party, Canberra Liberals and the ACT Greens
- staff of the Office of the Legislative Assembly
- Parliamentary Counsel
- the Electoral Commissioner, Auditor-General, Ombudsman and the Integrity Commissioner;
- relevant academics
- Centre for Public Integrity
- the Commissioner for Standards and Ethics and Integrity Advisor
- Any other relevant parties

Submissions will close on Wednesday, 16 December 2026 and any public hearings the Committee elect to conduct would be in early February 2027. The committee expects to be able to report late April 2027.

I encourage all members to contribute to the conduct of the inquiry.

Orders of the day—postponement

Ordered that orders of the day executive business No 1, relating to the Competition Legislation Amendment Bill 2026, and Assembly business be postponed until a later hour.

Housing and Consumer Affairs Legislation Amendment Bill 2026

Debate resumed from 17 September 2026, on motion by **Ms Cheyne**:

> That this bill be agreed to in principle.

MRS MORRIS (Brindabella) (12.13): The Canberra Liberals will support the Housing and Consumer Affairs Legislation Amendment Bill 2026. This bill makes practical changes to the administration of land titles, residential tenancies, retirement villages and owners corporations. These are largely sensible administrative changes. We support removing unnecessary red tape. Housing laws should be clear enough for

people to understand their obligations and practical enough for them to meet these obligations without unnecessary expense. Every additional process, delay and compliance requirement does have a cost. Those costs can flow through to the people buying or renting a home. At a time when household budgets are already stretched, governments should be looking for opportunities to reduce that burden.

However, on the residential tenancy provisions, I do want to be clear that the Canberra Liberals oppose the government's gas phase-out. We support choice and competition in the energy sector, and our support for this bill does not change that position. Canberrans should have a choice about energy that they use in their homes. Government should encourage providers to compete on price, reliability and service and allow households to weigh the options against their needs and budget. Removing an option does not remove the cost of replacing appliances or changing how a household heats its home. Those costs matter to ordinary Canberrans. Where a landlord does replace gas appliances with electric alternatives, however, the law should clearly establish the responsibilities of the parties involved, which is why we are effectively supporting these changes.

These are targeted amendments. We support making housing laws clearer and more workable and ensuring both renters and owners understand their rights and responsibilities.

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (12.15): The Greens will be supporting this bill. It makes a number of changes to the Land Titles Act, the Retirement Villages Act, the Retirement Villages Regulation and the Unit Titles (Management) Act, and the Attorney-General was kind enough to provide a briefing from her officials on the legislation. That briefing raised a lot of questions for the Greens.

We had some concerns about the removal of the internal disputes committee in retirement villages. The requirement for that was introduced in 2016, and of the 44 retirement villages, I understand only five have complied with the legislation. We asked for some further information from the Attorney-General's office. After that my office spoke to the ACT Human Rights Commission, the Council on the Ageing, COTA, and the Retirement Village Residents Association. We very much appreciate their time and their advice that has helped us come to a position of support on this bill.

The concerns we were worried about were that we heard that the internal disputes committee for retirement villages were finding it difficult to find an independent chair. The residents were having to pay for that independent chair and set up and run the committee. The residents were also concerned about confidentiality. Members of a village who needed to appoint a resident had the view that some residents did not want to state their views and did not want to be the public face of certain complaints.

Since 2019 the ACT Human Rights Commission has been offering a free complaints and dispute resolution service to residents of retirement villages. Those services are external, free, confidential, and they can offer counsellors and mediators to help resolve the issues between parties. I understand the Human Rights Commission has been extremely active in making sure residents of retirement villages are aware of their services and that they are provided with lots of options to resolve matters. I also understand that the human services part of the Human Rights Commission handled over

2,000 complaints last year, with some 43-odd matters related to older people in retirement villages. That has been a slight decrease in the numbers in 25-26, but the comment was made that operators are getting better at the way that they resolve matters, so that is a positive sign.

There was also a view that the internal disputes committee should be retained and the best play to resolve those disputes was at the local level, without requiring this legislative tool. After taking all those issues into account and after considering the vulnerable cohort of people that we have in retirement villages, the Greens have decided on balance to accept the government's recommendation to remove the legislated internal disputes committee. There were 39 villages that were notionally noncompliant with the legislation as it currently stands. Some of those villages were three or four units in size; some of them were 200 units in size. We obviously do not need the same legislative requirements for both of those.

We are also very grateful that the Human Rights Commission is offering their service, and it appears to be well known. Uptake is quite good. It is external, impartial and free. It does look to us like the residents in retirement villages do have an option if this option is taken away. It is also open for residents to take disputes to ACAT or for residents to approach operators directly with concerns. There are obviously significant barriers for both of those, but that will assist some residents.

The Greens also considered carefully the Unti Titles (Management) Act changes, because that reduces the size of quorums, and it makes a decision of reducing a quorum effective from the day after the decision is made. That removes the right to allow a petition to dispute the decision of the reduced quorum and via another meeting overturn the decision that was made. Presently the legislation allows 28 days for that petition to be made, which means the decision does not take effect for 28 days.

The size of quorums for executive committees was considered by the Assembly Standing Committee on Legal Affairs during its inquiry into the management of strata properties. In its report the committee noted the practical difficulties faced by owners corporations under the quorum rules and recommended the ACT government review the current quorum requirements for general meetings and special resolutions, noting that other Australian jurisdictions have lower quorum requirements. The government agreed to that recommendation, and the proposed amendments reflect some of the evidence the committee highlighted in its report when discussing how best to deal with the quorum requirements.

The Greens acknowledge that the unit title space is a complex area. The view of taking a matter to ACAT is considered a large to step by a lot of people, but the business of executive committees needs to be able to flow reasonably, and special resolutions are becoming a greater occurrence than was first anticipated. We are supportive of the amendments that have been brought forward.

We really welcome the elements of this bill which contribute to ACT's pathway in transitioning off gas. This is going well. The journey in getting off gas by 2045 is going to take many different members of the community coming together to manage that transition effectively and efficiently. Getting the incentives and the regulations right is important. These changes mean in certain circumstances landlords are no longer

required to provide gas connections or gas appliances to rental properties. We support that as part of the suite of changes the ACT needs to make to continue the transition off fossil fuel gas. It makes no sense to have to reinstall legacy gas when we have decided to phase out fossil fuel gas. The Greens will continue to advocate and agitate for that orderly transition that recognises the urgency of the climate crisis facing us. We need to make this transition as simple and easy for people as we can, and we need to take these opportunities at end of life to phase out fossil fuel gas, to move to electricity, and it is great to see that the Attorney-General has brought forward this minor change that facilitates that.

I do thank the Attorney-General for the briefing and the support of her offices on these amendments. We do need to make sure that we have enough time to consider them, and I will make sure in our office that we ask for briefings very early. This bill was certainly a complex one, and there were quite a lot of elements that we felt the need to check before we could say that the Greens were able to support this unamended. We are today happy to support this bill proceeding.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (12.22): I thank Ms Cheyne and her office and the directorate for bringing forward this legislation and for doing so in a consultative way that has been responsive to feedback from our community—and, from I could tell, it meets the feedback from members of the Assembly and parliamentary committee recommendations—and for working with my office around some concerns that we had with the changes.

Obviously, this is an omnibus bill, so there is a fair bit going on. I support the vast majority of it and think most of us would find it pretty uncontroversial. The one component of the bill that I have raised a small concern about has to do with changes to the Unit Titles (Management) Act 2011. I want to get that concern on the record.

I am supportive of the changes made to reduce the standard quorum requirements for general meetings from 50 per cent to 25 per cent. I note that this is in response to feedback from owners corporations that a 50 per cent quorum is not realistic a lot of the time, and that was reflected in a recommendation made by the inquiry into the management of strata properties. The final report was tabled earlier this year.

I have been on executive committees for a large complex and a small complex, and, speaking both from experience and from what I have heard from other executive committees, I absolutely agree there is an issue to resolve. What I have a concern with is the decision to remove the opportunity for owners to have an additional objection mechanism through the use of a petition within 28 days to dispute a general meeting decision made with the reduced quorum. I note that, at the moment, there are a hell of a lot of reduced quorum decisions happening at these meetings, given the fact that the standard quorum of 50 per cent of owners is clearly too high, and that makes the 28-day delay for decisions made under a reduced quorum problematic. It means many decisions—some that could be relatively urgent—are delayed by four weeks, even when they are highly unlikely to lead to any objections.

I have no issue with reducing that 28-day delay period so it is easier for owners corporations to make decisions and have them take effect in a reasonable amount of time, especially urgent decisions. The issue is that currently the use of a petition in that

28-day delay period is the only extra protection granted to owners to object to a decision because it has been made under a reduced quorum, and that protection is being removed, with the replacement dispute resolution pathway to be: "Go to ACAT. Take it to the courts." That does not make sense to me, given how many people I have heard from who do not want to have to go to ACAT to resolve disputes in strata managed complexes, which is why I have been pushing hard for a strata commissioner capable of resolving disputes without the need of escalation to ACAT.

I understand there is also a general way for owners to object to decisions, which is rallying 25 per cent of owners to call for another general meeting and basically reverse the decision that was made. But that is not an additional protection for a reduced quorum meeting; it is a general protection that exists regardless. When a reduced quorum decision is made, especially now that the standard quorum requirements have been lowered significantly—they have been cut in half—additional protections should remain in place for owners to dispute those decisions. Otherwise, why bother having a reduced quorum definition at all? The whole point is for extra checks and balances on those owners corporations when decisions are made under those circumstances. Even a reduced quorum situation is one where there is less confidence the decision made is actually representative of the majority of owners in the building.

In that scenario, my position is that we should be looking at retaining a dispute pathway that is a little easier than ACAT. I hope this is something the government will consider moving forward, noting that pathway is being removed through this bill. This view has been reiterated by stakeholders my office has spoken with throughout the week. They share the view that there should be an internal mechanism for dispute resolution to reduced quorum decisions, even if it is cut down to, say, a seven-day post-decision window. Going to ACAT is not a walk in the park. It may be a small court, but it is not a simple and un-burdensome process to take something to ACAT, as community members have repeatedly raised with me at mobile offices and with my team, and of course with the Standing Committee on Legal Affairs during its strata management inquiry.

So, while I support the vast majority of this bill and I am happy to support its passage today, I am concerned that this protection for owners has been weakened and that that may have consequences that have not been foreseen. Clearly, there are many and mostly fantastic executive committees that are committed to doing the right thing by the owners and tenants of their buildings, but that is not always the case. This change risks giving a small handful of owners more power with shorter decision-making timeframes and fewer avenues for their decisions to be undone.

What worries me is that I have been told stories of executive committees that have taken control over a building and have taken nefarious actions that are not widely supported—for instance, requiring owners to attend all meetings in person and then calling those meetings at times that do not work for most owners; and deliberately excluding those who cannot attend the meetings and then making decisions they might not support. Calling another meeting to reverse such decisions, which is the remaining pathway other than ACAT, does not work as a solution if the executive committee has added a requirement for in-person meetings into the buildings rules, as I have been told has occurred in at least one case. I fear that, although it may be a very small minority, these changes risk making owners lives harder in the rare cases where strata communities are

being run in such a way.

My team and I have engaged with the Attorney-General's office on this over the last month but especially this week. Unfortunately, we have not been able to reach an agreement on a compromise position, but, if this does turn out to be an issue that is experienced by members of our community, even if it is a small minority, I hope this will be revisited in the future. I would be very happy to engage constructively to ensure that occurs, if that is where we end up. With all of that said, I support this bill, while noting the concern about this particular change, and hope in good faith that it does not turn out to be an issue after all.

MS CHEYNE (Ginninderra—Manager of Government Business, Attorney-General, Minister for City and Government Services, and Minister for Transport) (12.28), in reply: In closing, the bill makes practical reforms affecting owners corporations, rental properties, retirement villages and land titles. It responds to longstanding stakeholder concerns and, on strata management, in part to the Assembly's inquiry. I thank members for their support of this bill.

The principal reform concerns owners corporations meetings. The current 50 per cent quorum is difficult to achieve, particularly in larger developments. Meetings often proceed with a reduced quorum, where people have to wait for the meeting to even begin, and then the decisions cannot take effect for 28 days and they may be overturned by a majority petition. In practice, the safeguard is rarely effective. An owners corporation unable to secure 50 per cent participation at a meeting is unlikely to secure majority support for a later petition. The result is an unnecessary delay, including to urgent repairs and legal action.

Consistent with recommendation 13 of the strata inquiry, the bill reduces the quorum to 25 per cent, confirms that valid proxy and absentee votes count towards it, and allows reduced-quorum decisions to take effect the following day. The same quorum will apply to unit-titled retirement villages. There are still important protections. Notice and minute requirements continue, 25 per cent of members may require a meeting, and anyone seriously concerned about a decision can apply to ACAT.

I acknowledge the concerns raised by Mr Emerson and him bringing his experience and at least one anecdotal experience to the Assembly. I have also had conversations with stakeholders and have my own experience, having lived in a strata complex and having been on an owners corporation for a strata complex for almost my entire time in Canberra. I would note that I think that an owners corporation unable to secure 50 per cent participation is unlikely to secure majority support for a later petition, no matter the timeframe. So, while I appreciate that Mr Emerson has sought to come up with a compromise position, ultimately there remains a quite minor policy disagreement. I think that is healthy. Certainly, if there are unintended consequences from this, we are of course very happy to look at this again. Ultimately, we have considered the concerns and we remain satisfied that the bill removes an ineffective process while preserving appropriate scrutiny and review.

The residential tenancy amendments support the transition from gas to electricity. Landlords will not be required to maintain a gas connection where no gas appliances remain. And the bill prevents tenants from seeking a rent reduction on the basis of an

electric appliance not being a like-for-like replacement of a gas appliance, as long as the replacement appliance is not unreasonable or impractical.

The bill also removes the requirement for every retirement village operator to establish an internal disputes committee. These committees can be burdensome and ineffective, particularly where residents are asked to adjudicate disputes involving neighbours. When I assumed responsibility for this portfolio area, this was the number one thing that I was told needed to be resolved, so I am glad that this bill does that. Villages may retain committees that work well, of course, and residents will continue to have access to the Human Rights Commission, ACAT and community dispute resolution services, but they will not be required to complete an internal process first if it does not suit them. The land titles amendments allow any physical address in Australia to be used as the service address on a caveat application, with an email address nominated as a secondary address.

Finally, I thank all members for their engagement on the bill. Certainly, we remain open to answer questions, arrange briefings and consider further amendments, as I flagged, if we see some unintended consequences from this. Ultimately, the concerns have been considered in as fulsome a way as we possibly could. The relevant protections remain. I thank Mr Emerson for supporting the bill regardless. We believe that the further work that this bill enables can continue without having to unreasonably delay its passage, so I commend the bill to this Assembly and look forward to the support of members.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Bill agreed to in principle.

Leave granted to dispense with the detail stage.

Bill agreed to.

Sitting suspended from 12.33 to 2.00 pm.

Questions without notice

Government procurement—conduct in procurement

MR PARTON: My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, following findings of serious corrupt conduct by Operation Kingfisher, which led to the resignation of the then Deputy Chief Minister, Master Builders ACT has rightfully called for action to restore confidence in the territory's procurement system. The estimates committee has also recommended an independent review of previous capital procurements.

Will the Chief Minister commit here and now to an independent review of previous ACT government capital projects over the last decade to establish whether other tenders were subject to inappropriate influence and whether taxpayers received value for money?

MR BARR: Well, of course, all previous tenders are going through a process of assessment. The Auditor-General is also an independent entity, so I am giving some

consideration to whether a referral to the Auditor-General would be the appropriate way to address the issues that the Leader of the Opposition has raised. It would then be up to the auditor to determine which, if any, projects his team wish to look at.

MR PARTON: Chief Minister, what evidence can you provide to demonstrate that the Campbell Primary School procurement was an isolated incident and not business as usual?

MR BARR: The absence of any other public allegations or referrals that I am aware of—and to the extent that there has been ample opportunity over the last decade for anyone to bring forward any concerns, and, where there were concerns, they were brought forward to the appropriate entities.

MRS MORRIS: Will the Chief Minister specifically commit to reviewing all major capital procurements involving similar tendering and evaluation arrangements and publish the findings?

MR BARR: I would refer the member to my answer to the first question. In relation to how one would define major, the threshold for the initial round was anything over $500,000. That has not identified any areas in the Education Directorate where a tender outcome differed from that recommended through the assessment process.

It is of course open to anyone to refer anything to the Auditor-General or, indeed, to the Integrity Commission. So that is available. What I am not interested in doing is spending tens of millions of dollars of taxpayer money going over projects that do not have any questions raised about them. The Auditor-General is certainly the independent entity. I would hope everyone would agree that it would be appropriate, were any matters to arise, to refer to the Auditor-General.

Drugs—Directions Health Services—syringes

MR PARTON: My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, local media reporting shows that ACT government-funded Directions Health Services has been forced to restrict access to injecting equipment because of an enormous surge in demand from people using peptides taking advantage of free syringes. Minister, when did ACT Health first become aware of these supply pressures? And what additional resources have been provided to Directions Health Services or have been requested?

DR PATERSON: I thank the member for the question. We have had this discussion with Directions ACT, and they have raised that there has been a surge in access to the needle and syringe program. We have also heard concerns from the Australian regulator, AHPRA, around this surge in peptide use in Australia. It is really concerning. I think what we saw in the media today that is concerning Directions is that their core business of supporting people in our community who inject psychoactive drugs and peptide use potentially takes away from their ability to serve that community. We have not had any specific requests for additional resources at this point, but we are absolutely aware of this as an increasing issue and will continue to work closely with Directions to monitor it.

MR PARTON: Minister, how much ACT government funding has been wasted on free

syringes for peptide users?

DR PATERSON: I do not think it has been wasted. I think it is just a change of use and access to this service. Obviously, if people are injecting substances in the community, we want them to do that safely. This is a trend that is happening nationally and internationally. We have seen—

Members interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Just ignore them.

DR PATERSON: We will continue to work very closely with Directions to monitor the situation, but this is a really concerning situation. In terms of the use of peptides in Australia, people are accessing them online from overseas. It is completely unregulated, and there are really concerning potential health outcomes for individuals who may use those peptides.

Members interjecting—

MRS MORRIS: Minister, what is your advice to social media influencers who are suggesting people access free syringes at Directions Health Services?

DR PATERSON: My words would be to social media influencers who are encouraging individuals to use these peptides and access these peptides or if they are selling these peptides—because what we are hearing from the federal government is just how dangerous these peptides can be. They most often do not contain the substance that an individual thinks they contain, and we are seeing more and more evidence of that. We are also seeing reports about, for example, one peptide that is designed to give you a tan really quicky. Apparently that is causing melanoma or increasing skin cancer risk in very young people. This is a really concerning trend. My message to the social media influencers is to stop doing this, to stop perpetuating substances that are unregulated in Australia.

Illegal tobacco—legislation

MRS MORRIS: My question is to the Minister for Health. Following commentary from the minister relating to the human rights implications of closing illegal tobacco shops, federal Labor minister Julian Hill said there was no:

> …unqualified human right to flog illegal stuff trying to get kids hooked on nicotine and vapes [and] funding organised criminals.

Mr Hill also said, "This is getting ridiculous. I met with these ministers eight months ago and they've gone around in circles, frankly," and he also warned that the territory was "at risk of becoming a national joke."

Minister, why were you citing human rights considerations as a reason for not committing to closure laws when even your own federal Labor colleagues think that argument is ridiculous and a national joke?

DR PATERSON: It took the Canberra Liberals a fair while to get to this one. This is really old news now. I went on ABC radio a couple of weeks ago and was asked what we are taking into consideration around closure laws. One of the things that we are taking into consideration is human rights, which is exactly what we take into consideration with every single piece of legislation we develop. It is a real shame that a member of federal parliament—

Opposition members interjecting—

DR PATERSON: The member obviously does not want to hear my response.

MR SPEAKER: Members.

DR PATERSON: Yes, it is a real shame that he did not contact me first to directly ask me about us progressing this legislation. I have been very forward leaning in the Police Ministers Council around our support of the tobacco work that has been going on nationally. Minister Stephen-Smith had announced to the chamber when the previous tranche of legislation was passed that we are progressing a second tranche of legislation. Since becoming health minister I have been briefed on this. Closure laws are absolutely part of the development of that legislation. We will be looking at serious criminal penalties for people who sell illicit tobacco and vapes in our community. We have always been transparent that that bill will be coming at the end of the year. It will be coming in the next sitting of this Assembly.

MRS MORRIS: Minister, what measures were discussed with Minister Hill eight months ago, and what progress has your government actually made in the time since those conversations were had?
DR PATERSON: I was not in the meeting that Mrs Morris refers to, so I cannot speak to that.

MR PARTON: Minister, do you accept the assessment of your federal Labor colleague that the territory is at risk of becoming a national joke under your watch?

DR PATERSON: No, and I spoke to Mr Hill about this and he apologised to me for his comments in the media and committed to us working together closely to achieve the best outcomes for the Canberra community. As I said, I have been participating in the Police Ministers Council for the last couple of years. There has been a very strong agenda around tobacco and illicit vapes as well as on firearms reform in Australia, and I have been very explicit of the ACT's support and participation in addressing these very serious policing concerns in our community.

Community facilities—management

MS CLAY: My question is to the Minister for the Public Service. The recent report by the Auditor-General titled *Management of community facilities*, paints a damning picture of the management of community facilities by ACT Property Gorup, Major Projects Canberra and Infrastructure Canberra. The audit showed that planning for the management of community facilities is ineffective. There is no asset management planning, which creates organisational and service delivery risks. There is no overarching framework for the management of community facilities. There are no

criteria for peppercorn leases, and government has no record of some of those leases. The organisations looking after these key community assets have not been doing their job. What action is the government taking to address the concerns in this damning report?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Ms Clay for the question. This was an audit report that in fact Infrastructure Canberra welcomed and sought, and on which it worked very closely with the Auditor-General and the audit office because they understood there were some significant challenges in relation to the management of community facilities. And they acknowledged the significant shortcomings that the report identifies.

The report makes 10 recommendations and 52 key findings, and the government takes those seriously and acknowledges the need for improvement. So, we will obviously be responding formally to the 10 recommendations in due course.

Infrastructure Canberra has engaged proactively with the audit office to undertake this performance audit, but it also itself identified many of those issues identified in the report, and has engaged with the work that has continued throughout the audit report. That includes updating the allocation policy, with community consultation already complete—and the updated allocation policy will be released shortly; standardising and modernising licence agreement templates; updating central agreement registers; providing dedicated procurement and contract management training; and undertaking meaningful structural reform in service delivery.

So, this will not be a response that starts subsequent to the release of the Auditor-General's report; this is a response that is already underway. And we certainly welcome the audit process as a further opportunity to strengthen how community facilities are managed, and the broader property function.

MS CLAY: Has the Labor government got a current asset management policy for community facilities, and if so, can you provide a copy?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Ms Clay for the question. The most recent strategic asset management plan covering the Infrastructure Canberra asset portfolio in its entirety was active from 2018 to 2023, and it is currently in the process of being updated.

Infrastructure Canberra is implementing its strategic asset management framework through a phased delivery program of work. The phased delivery of asset management plans, asset class management plans and strategic asset management reports reflects the need for a risk-based prioritisation within Infrastructure Canberra's available staff and resources for asset management.

Assets that do not have a contemporary asset management plan have not been excluded from, or ceased to be part of strategic asset management planning and active asset management. Rather, they are scheduled for future phases of implementation consistent with the strategic asset management prioritisation framework.

During 2024-25, Infrastructure Canberra completed asset management plans for 45 depot facilities, together with asset class management plans for the depot asset class.

Asset management plans were also completed for 13 entertainment and cultural facilities and seven aquatic facilities. Strategic asset assessment reports have also been completed for identified community-use assets.

All of this information was provided in a response to a question on notice from the Inquiry into Appropriation Bill estimates hearings, and a question that I took on notice on 21 July.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, when will a condition audit be carried out on the community facilities that have not had a condition audit to date?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Infrastructure Canberra is working through that process. I will take the detail of the question on notice.

Energy—plug-in solar panels

MR EMERSON: My question is to the Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water. Minister, Western Australia is set to become the first state or territory in the country to roll out plug-in balcony solar panels. This technology is widely used in parts of Europe to allow renters and other people living in apartments to access the benefits of cheap solar power. Last week, the Chief Minister posted on social media that the ACT Labor government is leading the nation on climate action. So why is Western Australia leading the nation on plug-in solar?

MS ORR: I thank the member for his question. "Leading the nation on climate action" goes to a range of activities, including having a commitment to reduce emissions, which is what we have been working to and what we have been leading on. With regard to the plug-in solar panels, I actually have this issue raised with me quite a bit. It is something that is being looked at through various different forums, including energy ministers meetings. A lot of the considerations go to how we make sure that the products, as they are importing into Australia, which is a responsibility of the national government, meet our standards; that we are providing a safe product, given it is electrical and requires electricity connections in it; and how we would implement that consistently across all jurisdictions within the regulatory frameworks we have.

So, while it might not be something that we shout about publicly or that the Chief Minister puts on his social media feed—which, I must admit, I do no seem to follow as closely as Mr Emerson—I think it is fair to say that it is definitely an issue on our radar. It is one we are looking at. Plug-in solar panels for balconies might be a small component and there might be some states charging ahead on looking at how they could ensure compliance within their jurisdiction. That is also something that we can all take the learnings from, but it will not be the sole determinant in leading on climate action or reducing our emissions and achieving net zero.

MR EMERSON: Minister, if Western Australia can do this, why doesn't plug-in solar feature in the ACT's new Climate Change Strategy, noting it was recommended in my community-led submission to the consultation process and, as you mentioned, it has been raised with you quite frequently?

MS ORR: I would refer the member to my previous answer, because that will provide

a lot of contextual information as to this question. The short answer if he wants one specifically to why it has not been included in the Climate Change Strategy is that we were looking at what would progress a broader transition. That does mean that it is necessarily the only thing that will ever be considered throughout this, and there are other forums where we are looking at things such as what Mr Emerson has raised.

MS CARRICK: Minister, why isn't the government doing more to address the current inequity in access to the benefits of the energy transition across our community?

MS ORR: I will take the member's question in the context of doing more to lead the way on plug-in balcony solar panels, which is what this question has been about and, again, refer the member to my previous answers. We also as a government continue to work across the National Energy Market and the national energy system on ways that we can bring consumer protections and consumer rights into what is a nationally consistent framework for transitioning the whole National Energy Market, of which we are a part, to a net zero future.

Burrangiri Aged Care Respite Centre

MS CARRICK: My question is to the Minister for Health Infrastructure. Minister, in response to Senator Pocock's questions in Senate estimates yesterday, commonwealth officials confirmed they have not received a detailed cost breakdown for the scope of the proposed $10 million Burrangiri upgrade, despite the ACT government announcing that Burrangiri will close for between six to 12 months while the works are undertaken. Minister, has the ACT government completed a detailed cost breakdown for the Burrangiri refurbishment, and, if so, when will that breakdown be released so the Assembly and the federal government can understand which works are essential, which works are discretionary, and how the $10 million will be spent?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I refer Ms Carrick to the multiple reports that have been tabled in this place that demonstrate the need for additional work at Burrangiri to ensure that it can be appropriate for delivering the exact type of aged-care respite services it currently delivers into the future and avoid potential service interruptions due to breakdown of ageing mechanical and other services. We have been through this many times in this place. The most detailed breakdown of the upgrades that are required is contained in the GHD report that was provided to the Health Directorate at the time, in relation to what would be required should Burrangiri be used as a temporary facility for the relocation of Arcadia House.

Subsequently, we got the report on the fire-safety upgrades that are required. That identified that $2.7 million would be required for urgent life-safety upgrades and fire-safety upgrades for the facility. But the final report from GHD in relation to that process—a process that Ms Carrick explicitly asked us to undertake—also said, quite directly, that, while the facility was going to be closed for this purpose, it would make sense to undertake the other structural works, including works around heating ventilation and air conditioning systems, the demolition and rebuilding of some parts of the facility, and accessibility improvements—not a lick of paint and not new carpet but structural improvements to the facility.

MS CARRICK: Minister, what analysis has been undertaken to determine that

Burrangiri needs to close for between six to 12 months, and what options were considered to reduce the length of the closure to minimise the loss of respite services?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Again I refer Ms Carrick to the reports that have been released and to my ministerial statement last week. Last week, I gave a ministerial statement about the agreement that we have reached with the commonwealth government, and that statement included extracts from the reports that I have been talking about—extracts that explicitly identify the upgrades that we are talking about. Of course, further work needs to be undertaken once there is access to a vacant building and the builder can get in there and understand what is going on behind the walls. Everyone in this place—even those who have been here for only a couple of years—should be very well aware that, as soon as you start going behind the walls of an existing building that was built in the 1970s or 80s, you are likely to find additional challenges. That is what will determine the ultimate timeframe and cost of what is required in this refurbishment process—the replacement of mechanical services, the replacement of gas assets with electrical for the heating, the ventilation and air conditioning system, the demolition of some of the extensions that now have a poor thermal envelope and poor flooring that needs to be replaced, and the accessibility upgrades to bathrooms, as well as the installation of a commercial kitchen. All of those things are detailed in the reports that Ms Carrick has had access to for quite some time.

MR EMERSON: Minister, how was the impact on the jobs of 40 staff at Burrangiri considered in the scope of works and the associated closure of the facility for six to 12 months?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: It seems like it is a very complex issue for people to get their heads around. There is a current contract with the Salvation Army to deliver the service at Burrangiri. That contract was due to expire on 30 June 2025. The very specific procurement advice from the directorate prior to that time was that, under the procurement rules, the directorate would be required to go to market and test the market should we want to continue to invest in that service. Subsequent to much discussion in this place at the beginning of last year, the directorate agreed that it could extend that contract for two years, but at the time, I was very clear that that was touch and go. I initially provided advice to this place that I believed that this place was asking directorate officials to breach procurement rules by directing me and the directorate to extend that contract.

The directorate identified that, given the $10 million that the commonwealth government had allocated to the delivery of infrastructure to support future respite services and given the conversations that were ongoing, they could in fact—they got legal advice—justify a two-year extension. The Salvation Army has known that was a two-year extension on a contract that was already due to expire on 30 June 2025. There is no capacity to extend that contract, and I am sure that staff working for the Salvation Army are aware of that.

Public housing—waiting list

MS BARRY: My question is to the Minister for Housing and Homelessness. Minister, there are currently 3,652 approved applicants on the public housing wait list. Of those, roughly how many are women who have applied for public housing after leaving a

situation of domestic and family violence?

MS ORR: I do not have that level of detail on me. I will have to take the question on notice.

MS BARRY: Roughly, how many are children on the public waiting list?

MS ORR: Mr Speaker, again, I will take it on notice.

MRS MORRIS: Minister, are the numbers trending upwards or down for these cohorts compared to where we were five years ago?

MS ORR: Mr Speaker, I will also take that on notice.

Yerrabi—major projects—deferral

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Minister for Planning. This year the government has deferred a number of Yerrabi projects, including the Casey emergency services facility, the Gungahlin police station and the north Gungahlin health centre. My understanding is that the Gungahlin Town Centre park will now join the list, with procurement by the SLA deferred until July 2028 at the earliest. Can the minister explain the cause of these delays and when the park will be complete?

MR BARR: I will take that on notice.

MS CASTLEY: Can the Chief Minister also tell us how much smaller the park is under the current design compared with the original design and why the government has reduced the size if they have done so?

MR BARR: I will seek some advice from the SLA and take that on notice.

MS CARRICK: Will the Chief Minister provide a breakdown of the $700 million that was deferred in the last budget?

MR BARR: That is not a question for me; that is a question for the Treasurer. That has been provided, I understand, during the last estimates hearings.

Canberra Lyric Theatre

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: My question is to the Chief Minister and Minister for Major Projects. Chief Minister, can you please update the Assembly on the progress of the Canberra Lyric Theatre project?

MR BARR: I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for the question. In short, the construction continues to progress very well. The project is, of course, delivering a new landmark cultural venue which will enable Canberra to host larger national and international productions that simply cannot be accommodated in our 1965 Canberra Theatre. The project is on track to top out early next year, with concrete slabs for the ground floor and the first floor already complete. The remaining concrete pours will occur over the summer. The structural steel frames for the upper levels are being installed early next

year. Throughout 2027 construction will move into the fit-out phase with seating installed and stage and technical equipment set up. We are expecting completion in mid-2028.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Chief Minister, how will the Lyric Theatre strengthen Canberra's theatre and cultural precinct?

MR BARR: Well, it certainly adds a major new venue to what is already a successful theatre and cultural precinct. Canberra Theatre Centre already hosts around 600 performances a year and attracts hundreds of thousands of visitors. The new Lyric Theatre complements the existing venues—it is obviously significantly larger—allowing a broader range of productions to occur. All of the major musicals, ballets, opera and other large scale productions that simply cannot come to Canberra now because the Canberra Theatre is too small in stage, back of house and seating capacity, will now be able, once this facility is open, to come to Canberra.

The 1965 Canberra Theatre was the best theatre in Australia in 1965. It is not anymore. It has significant limitations with stage size and seating capacity. That is why the new theatre was needed. The new theatre addresses those issues with a larger, modern amenity and a seating capacity of up to 2,000 people.

MS BERRY: Chief Minister, what economic benefits will flow from the continued growth of Canberra's theatre and entertainment precinct?

MR BARR: I thank Ms Berry for the question. The project is, of course, supporting construction jobs right now and will create ongoing employment opportunities across the arts, events, hospitality and tourism sectors. A stronger theatre precinct means more visitors, more spending and more jobs. To put some perspective on this, the precinct is already active around 250 nights a year. The government's objective is to continue to grow that activity. More performances, of course, mean more people dining in local restaurants, staying in local hotels and supporting city businesses. By year 5 of operations, the Lyric Theatre is projected to contribute $33.7 million annually to the territory economy, representing around 111,000 visitor nights.

Teacher Quality Institute—program accreditation

MISS NUTTALL: My question is to the Minister for Education. The ACT has taken important steps to limit the influence of fossil fuel companies in public schools through its corporate sponsorship policy. However, concerns have been raised that industry-backed organisations may still be reaching teachers, and potentially students, through professional learning programs marketed as government-accredited. For example, the Teacher Earth Science Education Programme (TESEP), which has documented support from fossil fuel companies including Glencore Coal and MACH Energy, is advertising professional development workshops in Canberra this December and describes them as ACT Teacher Quality Institute accredited.

Is the minister aware that organisations funded by fossil fuel companies are delivering professional learning to ACT teachers, including through ACT government recognised accreditation arrangements?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Ms Nuttall for the question. I was not aware and I am happy to raise that with the TQI.

MISS NUTTALL: Does the minister consider this to be consistent with the intent of the government's ban on fossil fuel sponsorship in ACT public schools?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I am not in a position to answer that question until I have got some further information from the TQI.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, will you commit to reviewing whether TQI accreditation requirements should include mandatory disclosure of industry funding and conflicts of interest?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mr Braddock for the supplementary, and I am happy to take the question on notice and consult further with the Education Directorate on this matter. Clearly, the Greens were able to access information about the involvement of particular companies in this, so I am not sure if that is already part of the process.

Roads—safety—Forrest

MR COCKS: My question is to the Minister for City Services. Minister, I understand that $611,600 has been allocated under the 2026-27 Black Spot Program to replace the give-way control at Arthur Circle and Monaro Crescent in Forrest with a small, mountable concrete roundabout. Minister, on what date will construction commence and when will the upgrades to this intersection be completed?

MS CHEYNE: I thank Mr Cocks for the question. I do not have that detail in front of me, but let me see if I can get it by the end of question time.

MR COCKS: Minister, has detailed design and procurement commenced, and will you guarantee that the project will be completed by 30 June 2027?

MS CHEYNE: I will also take that on notice.

MS LEE: Minister, what interim safety measures will be installed, and why has Labor left this known black spot unresolved for so long?

MS CHEYNE: Black spot funding, obviously, is a federal initiative. The panel is chaired by the federal member for Canberra, Alicia Payne. We certainly have made representations through that as we have learnt about issues that have come up across our city and what meets certain thresholds. I will take the detail of the question on notice and come back to the chamber.

Jamison shopping centre—footpaths

MR CAIN: My question is to the Minister for City and Government Services. Minister, a recent social media post has brought to light a footpath defect at the Jamison centre that signage at the site claims was left outstanding for months before being repaired by a member of the public. According to the signs, the repair cost $21 and took about 10 minutes. When residents start fixing public infrastructure themselves, Minister, it

raises serious questions about maintenance response times and confidence in the government's ability to address basic safety issues. Minister, does the government accept that, when residents start repairing public infrastructure themselves, it is a sign that the maintenance system is not meeting community expectations?

MS CHEYNE: I am aware of the social media post and that ABC Canberra was there this morning investigating, as Mary Goode does. It is something that I will be seeking some further advice on, and I will take that on notice.

But I would note that, in a general sense when it comes to repairing potholes, it really does depend on the overall condition and the use of an area. The Jamison car park is obviously very busy, but going through a car park, with the speeds that people travel through a car park, is very different to going through a major intersection, for example. I expect that it was assigned to a broader package of works that is usually delivered under a contract arrangement once a work order has been put together with a sufficient number of issues that need to be addressed together, which makes sense. But, regarding the specific pothole, I will seek some advice on exactly what Roads ACT had planned for it.

MR CAIN: Minister, what are the legal liability and insurance implications when a member of the public carries out repairs to government owned infrastructure?

MS CHEYNE: I think it depends on the infrastructure and the nature of it. Given I do not wish to mislead the Assembly, let me take that on notice and come back with an accurate answer.

MR PARTON: Minister, is it an indictment on the government that Canberrans have to resort to repairing potholes themselves?

MS CHEYNE: I reject that. Members would be aware that we had a serious issue back in 2022 when we had a period of substantial rainfall. Right across our city, we had potholes emerging everywhere and there was a considerable undertaking to fix those. That included a major budget initiative that Minister Steele was able to seek and deliver on, and that has provided funding over a considerable period of time. Members would note that, regarding the condition of our roads across the ACT—and even the Auditor-General's report recently has flagged this—there have been major improvements overall. I appreciate that the pothole at the Jamison centre car park may have been particularly annoying for a particular person and they have taken it upon themselves to address it, but I suspect that there were good reasons it had not yet been addressed. If there were not, then I will be asking some further questions.

Community facilities—1 Moore Street—management

MS VASSAROTTI: My question is to the Minister for the Public Service and the Minister for Health Infrastructure.

The Auditor-General's report on the management of community facilities refers to a Strategic Asset Management Plan 2018-23 project which references asset management plans for a number of community facilities, including 1 Moore Street. That asset management plan identified structural asbestos and fire retardants used throughout the

building and recommended removal at the cost of $1 million and decreased utilisation over a period of two years.

In June of this year, 1 Moore St was shut down because asbestos containing material was first identified in a plant room. But structural asbestos had been known to exist in 1 Moore Street in 2018. What action was taken to deal with asbestos in 1 Moore St between 2018 and June 2026?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I have a vague recollection that action was taken at that time, but I will take the question on notice and come back to the Assembly with further details in relation to that matter.

MS VASSAROTTI: How does Infrastructure Canberra identify what maintenance needs to be carried out at community facilities?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I spoke in the response to Ms Clay's question earlier about some of the work that Major Projects Canberra has been doing in relation to the management of its 243 property and land assets that it currently manages. In the response to the question on notice that I referenced earlier, there is an attachment that goes through every single one of these sites and when management plans have been created or whether they do not exist for those facilities.

As part of the 2026-27 budget, Infrastructure Canberra was funded to continue the implementation of the Strategic Asset Management Framework, and that funding will deliver additional asset management plans and asset class management plans as well as developing a new overarching strategic asset management plan for the directorate.

It is clearly the case, as the Auditor-General found, that there have been shortcomings in the way that strategic asset management has been undertaken, but I do want to recognise, very clearly, that this is not a reflection on any of the individuals involved. It is a reflection of the fact that the former Property Group was, and Infrastructure Canberra is now, managing a large portfolio of aging assets and that Infrastructure Canberra inherited that portfolio of assets without the ICT systems and the tracking systems that we would necessarily expect to be in place and the asset management plans that we would expect to be in place. So, asset management and property services functions have now been brought together within one group within Infrastructure Canberra, and they are undertaking a four-stream reform program on structure, processes, people and systems, in order to build a simpler model with clearer accountability and role responsibility.

MS CLAY: Minister, how much did Infrastructure Canberra spend on the maintenance of community facilities in 2025-26?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I imagine that information is available in the Infrastructure Canberra annual report, but I will take the question on notice.

Sport and recreation—dryland ovals

MR MILLIGAN: My question is to the Minister for Sport and Recreation. Minister, with summer sports starting back up, Canberrans are feeling the lack of playable

sportsgrounds. That is why, on 11 June, the Assembly called on the government to develop an accelerated reactivation schedule for Canberra's 32 dryland ovals, but the government has identified just five for potential reactivation. Minister, can the government confirm whether they have ruled out reactivating any of the remaining 27 dryland ovals?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. A huge amount of work is going in by the sport and recreation team in the City and Environment Directorate to get the ovals and sportsgrounds ready for the summer season. Of course, there was a momentary shutdown in between the winter and summer seasons to allow them to undertake that work, and the grounds are looking very good around the territory. They have been engaging, I know, with many of the clubs, especially the cricket clubs that will be using the ovals over the summer season, and other sports as well.

In relation to the dryland ovals, there was a multicriteria analysis undertaken of the dryland ovals, many of which were switched off during the millennium drought. It has identified and shortlisted five of those ovals for consultation with the community, and we want to hear from particularly sports clubs about whether they want to use those ovals for formal uses. There is substantial investment required to bring dryland ovals back into use as high-quality irrigated ovals. We are seeing that when the government has invested in bringing other ovals back up to that standard, like Duffy oval, for example, in my electorate of Murrumbidgee. It can cost between $1.5 million and $2 million in order to bring them back online. That is a substantial investment, so we want to make sure that they are going to be well used.

We will not be activating every single one of them at once. We have to be targeted, and that is why the government has shortlisted five initially to understand from the community whether they would use those both for informal and formal use. We will be engaging with the community further before we make further decisions about the activation of dryland ovals, but we are keen to hear from the communities that are using our sportsgrounds. That is why we have a community infrastructure survey that has gone out to clubs and peak bodies.

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, when will you fulfil the promise of the former minister to provide a reactivation schedule, including dates for bringing the five ovals back into use?

MR STEEL: Once we have consulted with the community.

MR COCKS: Minister, are any of the remaining 27 dryland oval sites currently being considered for rezoning, redevelopment or alternative uses?

MR STEEL: I understand that there is currently a major plan amendment that has been proposed by a private proponent in relation to the site at Lyneham for part of the use of that oval for a car park. Obviously that is something that will be considered. It is being assessed by the Territory Planning Authority. It will come through to me, as minister, in the future for a decision. It will no doubt come to the Assembly as well. That is the one that certainly I am aware of. It is not a government proposal. It has been put forward by a private proponent.

Generally speaking, we need to keep our sportsgrounds available for community use as our population grows, because we know that we need those sportsgrounds to be available for our growing population. That has certainly been recognised in the Southern Gateway Planning and Design Framework, which envisages that, as we see the population within the Woden Valley grow, we will not only need to keep the sportsgrounds that we have but augment them. That is why it has also identified additional ovals beyond the five that we have been consulting on through this process in the future that may need to be reactivated at ovals like Lyons, Chifley and Farrer, in addition to Torrens, which has already made up part of the five that are being consulted on at the moment. We are certainly planning, with that population growth, for reactivation of the oval. One of the benefits that comes with densification is that we can get better use out of facilities and invest back into the community, so not only the new residents benefit, but the existing residents benefit too.

Transport Canberra—MyWay+

MR BRADDOCK: My question is to the Minister for Transport. Minister, I understand the problem of installing MyWay+ readers on the Custom Denning buses has finally been solved. Minister, if that is the case, how much does this cost the ACT government, both for the installation and the forgone revenue whilst we have been waiting for those readers to be installed?

MS CHEYNE: I thank Mr Braddock for the question and his ongoing interest in all things public transport. Well, I regret to let Mr Braddock down, but the installation is not yet complete. I am advised, just recently, that one of the four Custom Denning buses has been fitted. Transport Canberra has, however, instructed its installer to proceed with the remaining three. The advice I have is that the hardware and the fit-out kits for all four buses cost $7,748 and the installation of the first bus cost $3,645. The cost of installing the remaining three buses is still to be confirmed, as is the final cost after any credit under the NEC contract.

I do not have a reliable figure for the fare revenue forgone. I will attempt to give it, but anything is going to be an estimate. This is particularly because with the Custom Denning buses, as I think Mr Braddock is aware, we need to be looking at the periods when each bus was actually carrying passengers while they did not have a functioning MyWay+ reader, but these are buses that spent considerable periods out of service for separate mechanical work. So that will need to be taken into account. So, I will take the reconciled installation cost, noting that I might not have it until that work is completed, and that revenue estimate on notice.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, what role did the contract between the ACT government and NEC play in determining those costs?

MS CHEYNE: I thank Mr Braddock for the question. I will get to NEC, but the issue really, somewhat substantially, begins with Custom Denning. The Custom Denning electric buses that we procured had to be returned to the Sydney facility for maintenance and repairs on many occasions. Transport Canberra and Custom Denning have been working together to resolve those issues, but for significant periods of time they were not in the operational fleet, so they were not actually available for the fit-out.

To go to the actual fit-out and the contract with NEC, each bus requires an installation design suited to its dashboard and cabin, and the four Custom Denning buses have a different configuration from other buses in the fleet so they require a separate design and fit-out. They were included in the original MyWay+ installation scope, but they were not fitted in the main installation program, and then the installation operation was subsequently disbanded and since then Transport Canberra has engaged a local installer familiar with the fleet. The work order provides a credit for the installation labour originally charged under the NEC contract, and major MyWay+ equipment is also to come from existing contract quantities. I do not have those costs and the credit yet, but I am seeking a reconciliation of those so I can establish the final amount paid by the territory.

I do recognise that the installation has taken way too long. Progress has more recently been affected by waiting for installation instructions and an inspection from NEC, which is why we are proceeding with our own installer.

MS CLAY: Minister, has NEC reached the contract conclusion? And has it reached milestone 31 under the contract now?

MS CHEYNE: No, it has not, Mr Speaker. No, it has not. I know that remains incredibly disappointing, but I think it goes without saying that, as this place well knows and as has been canvassed many times, MyWay+ has consistently not delivered what Canberrans were promised and some issues have taken far too long to resolve.

I have been clear, as I made out in my response last week, with NEC including directly to its CEO that it is responsible for delivering an end-to-end solution and that means understanding the impact of a problem on customers and on Transport Canberra's operations, fixing it and demonstrating that the fix works. So deploying a fix is not enough, it has to be validated in a real operating environment before Transport Canberra can be satisfied that the issue is resolved.

What I can say is, while those milestones have not been completed, we are using the contractual and governance mechanisms available to us much more deliberately, which I think is what the Canberra community would be expecting. Within government we are strengthening quality assurance through a risk-based approach and formal decision points so that issues are properly tested and decisions are made with clear evidence. Again, it is worth reiterating that ultimately the test that really matters is whether passengers and staff experience a measurable improvement and whether Transport Canberra can verify that NEC has delivered what it is required to deliver, which is an end-to-end solution.

Public schools—funding

MS LEE: My question is to the Minister for Education. Minister, it was revealed that your directorate developed a multi-hazard risk assessment document and created a crisis management team to deal with the fallout from changes to school budgets, and assessed there being a medium risk of occupational violence as a result of the budget process.

Minister, have any ACT government principals or staff raised any work health and safety concerns with you or the directorate, either during the budget consultation

meetings or any other meetings, as a result of the budget process?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Yes. Work health and safety notifications have been raised in relation to this process, by principals and others.

But I am not convinced about the way that Ms Lee has brought together the occupational violence risk that was identified in the risk assessment. My understanding is the risk in relation to principals in particular, which she appeared to be referring to, is in relation to psycho-social hazards and the stress that is placed on principals in managing through this process.

We have recognised the risk of that distress over time—throughout the process, I should say—including, as I quoted from my opinion piece that came out on 12 September, reassuring principals that they would be supported through this process. Among other things, the Education Directorate leadership has sought to work with principals. But we do know that this is a stressful period for principals.

We are trying to take a supportive approach. The point of a risk assessment process is to understand potential risks that can arise, and to ensure that action is taken to mitigate those risks. That is what the Education Directorate has been doing.

I read out yesterday, Mr Speaker, an email sent from the principal of Mount Rogers Primary School to the school community, clearly indicating that the inaccurate reporting, and the repetition of that, had created additional workload and additional demands for that principal to reassure their school community in terms of the facts.

MS LEE: Minister, what tangible actions have you or your directorate taken to, in your words, support the principals and take a supportive approach as a result of this process?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Well, as I have indicated, changes have been made to the process for the school budget processing. That has been a direct response to the feedback from principals in relation to some of the challenges that they identified in terms of living within their Student Resource Allocation budgets, and that they needed more time and more support to work through those processes. And so, the process was slowed down.

Ms Lee, in her first question, referred to a crisis management team. That was established within the directorate. Now, it is really important to recognise that that was not because the directorate saw this as a crisis; it is a process that the directorate has for bringing together resources across the directorate—senior resources—to support the ongoing implementation of the 2027 school budgets process.

So, in term 3, the directorate was aware that this was a significant planning process for schools. And throughout term 3, the directorate sought to ensure that school leaders had practical support to work through their 2027 school staffing profiles— recognising that every year schools make decisions about staff they will need the following year, as well, as enrolments and student needs change.

They provided dedicated budget and staffing tools; direct support from executive education leaders, and people and performance; and regular opportunities for schools

to work through their individual circumstances.

The proposed workforce profiles that were submitted in September gave a stronger evidence base and a clearer system-wide picture, but those profiles were only part of the planning process.

MR PARTON: Minister, how many reports have you received? Is WorkSafe involved?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I will take the detail of that question on notice. I did discuss it with the Education Directorate on Monday morning, but the numbers are likely to have changed since then.

I want to emphasise, though, that the changes that have been made to the process, including the changes that we are going through early in term 4, are a direct response to feedback from principals.

Principals received a budget planning tool in week 1. We are currently in the process of undertaking school budget assessments through a framework that has been established, which will consider the whole picture including each school's budget and financial position, workforce, timetabling and use of resources, school operations, curriculum needs, student support needs including support for students with disability, and work health and safety risk.

At the same time as that process is being undertaken, work health and safety staff consultations are occurring in weeks 3 and 4. So, consultation is taking place now, so that staff feedback can inform assessment before arrangements for school budgets in 2027 are confirmed.

I would just reiterate, as I have a number of times, that no ACT public school has had its budget finalised for 2027, and no final decisions have been made about staffing profiles or individual employees.

Those final projected budgets and workforce profiles are expected to be provided to schools in week 5. Just today I have seen a message from the Australian Education Union to its members, encouraging them to participate in this work to ensure that all of the implications of budgets can be understood.

National Multicultural Festival 2027

MS BERRY: My question is to the Minister for Multicultural Affairs. Minister, could you provide an update on preparations for the National Multicultural Festival for 2027?

MR PETTERSSON: I thank Ms Berry for the question and, as always, her continuing support for the National Multicultural Festival. The National Multicultural Festival is the ultimate community celebration of cultural diversity and inclusion in Canberra. The festival will be held from 5 to 7 February and planning is well underway. The team are busy finalising the site plan, approving grant applications, allocating stalls, programming fantastic shows as well as making sure that the festival will have something for everyone.

I look forward to making further announcements about the programming in the not too distant future. What I can say now, though, is that we have made a call for Canberrans to put their hand up to volunteer at the festival. Applications are open until 1 December, and I would encourage everyone listening to jump on the festival's website and consider signing up, and I would encourage members to promote it on their social media channels as well.

MS BERRY: Minister, what types of volunteer roles are available at the festival and what skills or experiences are the organisers particularly seeking?

MR PETTERSSON: I thank Ms Berry for the supplementary. There is a wide variety of roles available, each of which presents a fabulous opportunity to enjoy the festival and an opportunity to meet people from across our great city. Our wonderful volunteers can help set up the stages and host performances as masters of ceremonies. They make the parade possible and they help attendees navigate the festival. We welcome people with a range of interests and skills to sign up, including those who enjoy helping people, working behind the scenes, supporting events or just sharing their language and their cultural knowledge. Volunteers who speak languages other than English are particularly encouraged to apply, so that we can support people from our diverse cultures and keep the festival as accessible as possible.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Minister, why are volunteers so important to the festival?

MR PETTERSSON: I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for the supplementary as well as his ongoing support for the festival. Volunteers are what make the festival such a strong community event. Their enthusiasm creates the vibrant atmosphere that attracts thousands of visitors and allows our multicultural community to showcase itself to our city and our nation. At its heart, the festival's success relies upon volunteers, our community groups sharing their culture through performance and stalls as well as the wider community coming together to celebrate diversity, inclusion and multicultural spirit.

Each and every year this brings together all elements of Canberra into one of our most loved events. I am sure all members in this place cannot wait for the 2027 festival, and I look forward to seeing all members there.

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

Answers to questions on notice

Questions 1502, 1532, 1554, 1556 and 1557

MS CLAY: I regret to say I have got a few outstanding questions on notice that are overdue. Under standing order 118AA, I request an explanation from the Attorney-General for why Q1502 has not been answered; from the Chief Minister for why Q1532 has not been answered; from the Minister for City and Government Services for why Q1554 and Q1555 have not been answered; and from the Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development for why Q1557 has not been answered.

MS CHEYNE: Mr Speaker, certainly, for me, as Attorney-General and Minister for City and Government Services, the period that Ms Clay refers to with all those

questions is the period when the government received more than 200 questions to be responded to within 30 days, and I received the bulk of those across those two portfolios. It would help if some members did not ask the same question over and over.

Due to that, Mr Speaker, some of those responses and answers have taken many, many hours. You would see that some of the responses that I have tabled so far have cost thousands of dollars in time to prepare, and, regrettably, there are still some that are outstanding. I think for the ones that Ms Clay has mentioned, it is usually because I have wanted to check something against something else for accuracy, but I will come back exactly when I look at those exact questions.

MR SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister. There were some other ministers there who were asked. Chief Minister?

MR BARR: Yes; was it Q1532?

Ms Clay: Q1532.

MR BARR: I am just looking at that one. That one requires me to consult with every other minister in relation to information about Big Splash pool, so I think that consultation period, to get an accurate answer, has taken awhile. It was only due on the 25th, so it is only a few days overdue.

MR SPEAKER: There was at least one other minister. Mr Steel?

MR STEEL: I think it was Q1557. I will check in relation to that question and come back to the chamber today.

Supplementary answer to a question without notice
Extreme weather—heat and smoke refuges

MS ORR: I have a matter arising in regard to Mr Braddock's question on 21 October regarding heat and smoke refuges. Mr Speaker, I did take a look at the *Hansard* proof transcript, and, on reflection, I think there is a nuance that requires further clarification, as the answer could differ depending on the exact situation being asked about.

In a declared heat or bushfire emergency, there are identified facilities that are stood up to operate as a dedicated heat or smoke refuge—for example, community clubs. These are identified and operationalised under our emergency preparedness planning and in recognition of the additional needs of the community during an emergency. As I am sure everyone in this place will be aware, heat and smoke impacts, though, can occur outside of an emergency declaration, and there are many facilities that will provide refuge, whether formally declared or not.

As Mr Braddock's question did not specify he was seeking information only on refuges declared in an emergency event, I took the question to be asking in the broadest terms for places that could provide relief from smoke or heat over the course of the summer period. And to this end, I did mention that Canberrans will have access to swimming pools. I would just like to clarify for the record that while swimming pools do provide relief from the heat, there are no formal provisions for use of swimming pools as a

declared heat or smoke refuge during an emergency.

Legislative Assembly—standing order 42
Speaker's ruling

MR SPEAKER: Members, following a point of order earlier this week during question time about directing comments through the chair, which you will recall, I have been reviewing the *House of Representatives Practice*, reading the *Companion to the Standing Orders*, looking at previous rulings in this place and also looking at current practice in the federal parliament. Members will be aware that standing order 42 requires that members when speaking in the chamber address the Speaker. As the *Companion to the Standing Orders* notes, it is considered that remarks directed at other members across the chamber could lead to disorderly behaviour.

House of Representatives Practice, as upheld by a ruling in this chamber in 2010, holds that members will not address the House in the second person. This means that members should not be addressing each other as "you" or using the term "your", and I have noted a couple of questions today that did that—one from the government and one from the opposition, as an aside. I will quote from the *House of Representatives Practice*:

> The purpose of this rule … is to make debate less personal and avoid the direct confrontation of Members addressing one another as 'you'.

That is a direct quote. It is fair to say that in this chamber, over a period of time, we have strayed from this practice, and particularly during question time, members do refer to each other as "you".

I will ask members to return to the practice of properly addressing their remarks through the chair and addressing members with their title or their name. By way of example, "Mr Speaker, what is the Chief Minister doing to support small business in Canberra?" is correct, whilst a question that would say, "Chief Minister, what are you doing to support small business in Canberra?" is not. I expect that this will require a bit of adjustment, and at this stage it is not—

Mr Barr: Thanks for picking on me there, Mr Speaker!

Mr Milligan: It's a fair question!

MR SPEAKER: It is a good question; it just needs to be asked properly, Mr Milligan. I was not picking on you, I assure you.

Members, I expect that this will require a period of adjustment, and this statement is not an invitation for constant points of order any time someone errs; rather, it is a request that members be mindful of the wording of their questions. I am available to work with members prior to the next hearing to assist in understanding this ruling, should they wish, and how it should be applied. I am always available to any member.

Legislative Assembly—unparliamentary language
Speaker's ruling

MR SPEAKER: During a debate yesterday on Ms Lee's school budget process motion the Assistant Speaker took a point of order from Ms Lee whilst the Minister of Education was speaking over the use of the word "misleading". The Assistant Speaker said that he would refer the *Hansard* to me for a ruling, and the proof of *Hansard* shows the following: "Despite being told multiple times, Ms Lee continues to take the funding amounts that that were reported in the *Canberra Times* as some sort of gospel and then continues to spread misinformation and confusion about specialist school funding." That is what was stated by the minister.

Mr Cocks, on the point of order, helpfully observed, at a point of order taken at the time, that accusations of misinformation are not necessarily unparliamentary if it is misinformation in the community. That is the advice that I have provided. I consider the term "misinformation" should be treated the same way as "misleading". I note back to Speaker Berry's 2003 ruling, which has been applied pretty consistently since then:

> Misleading this house is a very serious matter. Claims about members misleading the community have been made in the past and are allowed in this place.

The minister's words were ambiguous as to whether the misinformation was occurring and the point of order was properly raised. In the resulting discussion of the point of order the minister assured the chamber that she was referring to comments in the community, and so no further action is required. If members wish further, it is pretty clear that if it is about the community, it is allowed. If you are talking about misleading the chamber, it is not.

Supplementary answer to a question without notice
Burrangiri Aged Care Respite Centre—upgrade funding

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Just to provide a little more detail in relation to Ms Carrick's question about the works at Burrangiri, referring back to my ministerial statement last week, key works identified to date include replacement of ageing mechanical services, including heating, cooling and ventilation, with energy-efficient electric systems; electrical and lighting upgrades, including replacement of the main switchboard and distribution boards; construction of a new commercial kitchen; sustainability improvements, such as double-glazed windows; upgrades to clinical and staff areas; demolition and rebuilding of courtyard infill extensions to make them safer and more usable; refurbishment of resident bedrooms and bathrooms, including vital accessibility upgrades; landscaping works; and the incorporation of dementia-friendly design principles.

In case anyone was concerned that I was verballing the consultants, the consultants did indicate that:

> The need to temporarily close the facility provides a practical window to undertake additional works that would otherwise be difficult to deliver in an occupied 24/7 residential care environment.

Also:

> A consolidated upgrade approach would enable the ACT government to address existing asset condition, accessibility, amenity, sustainability and services issues

at the same time as the required light safety works. This would reduce the likelihood of repeated future disruptions, improve outcomes for residents and staff and support the continued use of the building for a care model aligned with the class 9C facility.

Legislative Assembly—standing order 42

MR PARTON: Can I just seek a clarification regarding your statement and particularly about question time. You mentioned in your statement that it has long been a precedent in this chamber, certainly in the time that I have been here when questions have been asked the way that they have been asked, where we have said, "Minister, you have done—" Can I just ask: has that method of asking questions been challenged? I think our question time functions better than any question time in any parliament in Australia. What is the reason for implementing those standing orders to the letter? That is the clarification I am looking for.

MR SPEAKER: It is to make sure, essentially, that we are consistent with standing orders. Standing orders require that statements be put through the chair. I provided the exact quotes from *House of Representatives Practice*, from the *Companion to the Standing Orders* and from previous rulings in this place by Speakers that were consistent with that.

I do not make the rules; I apply them. If members think that at the end of the day we should be addressing each other as "you" or addressing each other directly across the chamber, then that would require a change of standing orders or practice in this place that we can apply. As I said, there is a period of adjustment. I am not saying we should have a point of order, as I said in my ruling, on every use of that, but I do think that in order to make sure that, as is clear in *House of Representatives Practice*, it does not create an intemperate environment. There is a direct quote that I provided in the speech, and I will provide it to you, saying that avoiding confrontation of members is the reason. That is why we are going to go down that route, Mr Parton.

If you disagree with that, then I think that there is a review of standing orders that I alerted to earlier. We can look to address it. At the end of the day there was a point of order raised earlier this week, which then prompted me to look at those documents, so that is why I think it is reasonable. If members think that we should be encoding a different way of doing it, that is open for us to do, but I have got to enforce the rules as they are.

Papers

Mr Speaker presented the following papers:

Annual Reports (Government Agencies) Act, pursuant to section 15—Annual Report 2025-2026—Office of the Legislative Assembly, dated October 2026—Corrigendum, dated 27 October 2026.

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

ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement 2019-2028—National

Agreement on Closing the Gap—Procurement Policy, undated, together with a statement.

Annual Reports (Government Agencies) Act, pursuant to section 13—Annual Report 2025-2026—Director of Public Prosecutions—Corrigendum, undated.

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

Part-time Public Office Holder—Determination 14 of 2026 (Amended), 21 October 2026.

Part-time Statutory Office Holder—Integrity Commissioner—Determination 10 of 2026 (Amended), dated 21 October 2026.

Richardson Shops development—Assembly resolution of 24 June 2025—Government response—Update, dated October 2026.

Social Policy—Standing Committee—Report 6—Inquiry into E-Petition 077-25, access to 11-12 ATAR language courses in 2026—Government response, dated October 2026.

Sporting Infrastructure in Tuggeranong—Improvement—Assembly resolution of 16 September 2026—Government response, dated October 2026.

Theatre Lane car park vicinity—Accessibility—Assembly resolution of 30 October 2025—Government response, dated October 2026.

Electoral (Eligibility) Amendment Bill 2026

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

Title read by Clerk.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (3.20): I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

Mr Speaker, the last few years have been rough for our democracy, even more so in the last few weeks. Democracy, conceptually, has been suffering. If you were to head outside right now and ask people waiting for the bus to come up with words to describe politics, you would probably hear some sort of combination of the following: selfish, uncaring, childish, bigoted, pointless, nasty. I could go on, and the attitude is almost entirely negative. Optimism is scarce. Hope is drained.

Something that scares me personally is not simply that the attack on Helen Haines, outside of her electorate office, actually happened but the simple fact that, in the back of my mind, I was not actually surprised by that fact. The escalation of political discourse; the downward spiral of common courtesy, respect and willingness to listen; and the impacts of social media—which originally promised to bring us together and connect us but instead drives us apart—combined to create a sense of inevitability that an attack like this was bound to happen at some point. It was only a question of who, when and where. And it turned out to be Ms Haines, one of the best of us.

And I weep; democracy itself weeps. Over the last decade, we have watched a decline unfold. Our communities are being divided. We have become increasingly fearful of

one another. As a wise teacher of the silver screen once warned us back in 2001: "Fear leads to anger. Anger leads to hate. Hate leads to suffering." We are suffering. Our democracy is suffering. And I believe that if we are to remedy that suffering, then the panacea lies in facing our fears. Democracy in Australia and in Canberra needs a boost. Hope and trust need a boost. If we want to avoid sliding with our fear and our hatred into imperial and authoritarian systems, then we need more democracy, not less.

The Electoral (Eligibility) Amendment Bill 2026, which I have just introduced, will expand the right to vote at territory elections. This bill will lower the voting age to 16-year-olds and allow permanent residents in the ACT to join the electoral roll. At its heart, this is about telling these cohorts of people that they matter: we trust you; we have confidence in you to make good choices like any other member of our community; you are a valued part of our society here in Canberra, where you live, where you play, where you work, where you pay tax, where you celebrate your weddings and your festivals, and where you grieve your lost loved ones who have passed away.

The academic evidence demonstrates that the development of cold cognition is in place by the age of 16. The prefrontal cortex of the brain is what governs consequence-informed decision-making, and the necessary foundations for rational reasoning in normal circumstances are reliably in place by the age of 16. Yes, there is more development that occurs until the mid-20s, especially in ways to support people in overcoming the instinct in fight-or-flight situations involving high pressure. But these situations are not what confront voters at the ballot box, where people are free from peers, scrutiny and stress. So young people are cognitively capable of voting.

We must also stop applying a higher test for young people than adults when it comes to their interest and ability to vote. I have knocked on a few doors in my time, and I have had frequent experience in talking to adults who had zero interest in voting and democracy. So my challenge to members is this: do not apply a higher bar to young people unless you want to justify why adults like this should get a free pass.

I find the opposition to letting young people vote sooner is actually rooted in fear. Anyone who has been a parent understands this point—you have protected them for their whole lives. And a challenge for parents—and I am acutely aware of this as a father of two daughters—is that we also need to develop the trust in our children to make good choices and to manifest the lessons we have spent so long teaching them. We need to trust that they will learn from their mistakes along the way. We need to recognise when they are ready. We need to learn to let go of our fear.

Another fear we need to let go of is our fear of immigrants: the fear that those "other" people will come in and muck up our way of life. It is the very fear upon which this country developed the white Australia policy and, around the same time, Australia's first electoral laws. In 1902, the Commonwealth Franchise Act gave women from all Australian states the right to vote in federal elections—and good on them. But that same law prescribed that, "No aboriginal native of Australia, Asia, Africa or the Islands of the Pacific except New Zealand shall be entitled to have his name placed on an Electoral Roll …" unless they had already obtained that right in their home state first. And it stayed that way for First Nations Australians up until 1962. In fact, even at that time, voting was tied to being a British subject who was resident in Australia, because that was how we kept the "undesirables" at bay.

It was only comparatively recently, in 1984, that voting rights became associated with citizenship. This is important, because it reminds us that Australia actually has a history of allowing foreign nationals to vote—just, you know, the white ones. We have always feared the "other", the different-looking migrant. But, equally, we also tend to discover, when we get to know them, that they are good, decent human beings, just like any of us.

Around the world, it is quite common for places to recognise that the best basis for voting rights is residency rather than nationality, particularly when it comes to the local governments that administer municipal services—so much so that it has factored into the treaty on the functioning of the European Union. Across the EU, voting in local elections is based on residency.

Over in the USA, in Washington DC, a city that serves a very similar purpose to what we have here in Canberra, they enacted non-citizen voting rights back in 2022—and, yes, I am jealous. Non-citizens are eligible to vote in the upcoming New Zealand election. Non-citizens are already able to vote in the city of Melbourne. Offering permanent residents the right to vote is about acknowledging that this is their home. We have already given them a permanent visa. We need to trust them. We need to make their voices matter in our democracy.

There are a few more notes I can make on this bill that come from the human rights analysis, before I wrap up. The penalties for non-enrolment and non-voting offences are halved for people under 18 years old, in recognition of reduced capacity to pay a penalty. Extending voting rights also technically extends the right to stand for election, including to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body for First Nations people, and this is reflected in the bill. Being on the electoral roll also means you can be summoned to serve on a jury, but I have structured the bill to keep that at 18 years old.

There is a wealth of prospective amendments to this bill that I am prepared to entertain, ranging from how we handle the enforcement of compulsory voting through to the specifics of MLA eligibility. But the question I have will be: do members support the bill in principle, conceptually? Do they support permanent residents and 16- and 17-year-olds having the right to vote at the ballot box?

What I am fundamentally pushing for, and what I really want to see, is a vote of confidence in the young people and migrant communities of the ACT, to say: "We trust you. We do not fear you. We welcome you. We value you and we want to hear your voice." We as representatives need to say it, and they need to be able to hear it. I commend my bill to the Assembly.

Debate (on motion by **Ms Stephen-Smith**) adjourned to the next sitting.

Long Service Leave (Portable Schemes) Amendment Bill 2026

Debate resumed from 5 May 2026, on motion by **Mr Cocks**:

> That this bill be agreed to in principle.

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) (3.31): The ACT government does not support this bill. In just two months and a few days thousands of Canberra workers in hospitality, accommodation, hair and beauty will finally have access to portable long service leave. These are people who can spend decades working in their chosen profession, moving between employers, without ever accumulating enough continuous service to access an entitlement that other workers take for granted. This government believes that this should change.

Apparently, the Canberra Liberals disagree. The bill before us positions itself as a harmless and well-intentioned review of the scheme, but let's be clear about what is happening here. The Canberra Liberals opposed this expansion when it was legislated. They have opposed its implementation. Now, with the commencement just two months away, they have discovered an urgent need for a review. At what point does scrutiny become obstruction? This is a flagrant attempt to place needless roadblocks in front of the expansion of portable long service.

To be honest, I struggle to understand why this bill does not have the courage to just call for portable long service leave or at least this expansion of the scheme to be scrapped. This is a scheme that the Canberra Liberals have by their own admission opposed at every turn. I do not understand why they do not just bring forward a bill that actually represents that view. For the Canberra Liberals, workers being unable to access their long service entitlements because of the nature of their industry is apparently not a problem worth solving, and I think that speaks to a broader issue with how those opposite view these workers and their careers.

There is an assumption central to the claims of the Canberra Liberals and other detractors of this expansion that I want to challenge. It is the notion that work in these sectors is inherently a short-term gig, something you do for a while when you are at school or uni before moving on to something else. While that may be true for some people, it is by no means a universal experience, and for the betterment of these industries this view needs to change. I believe assumptions like this show a disregard for the experience, skills and dedication of the people working in these industries. For many, these are vocational careers—careers in which people have invested years of training, both formally and informally, yet the Canberra Liberals conveniently erase this experience and characterise these jobs as nothing more than stepping stones on the way to something else.

Those opposite seem to see some jobs as worthy of remaining in and others not. On this side of the chamber we believe that all jobs should be good jobs. I believe that vocational careers like those in hospitality, accommodation, hair and beauty are excellent and rewarding careers, and we should support more Canberrans to pursue them. We need more people working in hospitality. We need more people working in accommodation services. We need more hairdressers and beauty professionals. Importantly, we need people to stay in these industries. Think about someone who spends four years working in one restaurant, four years at another and another four years at a third. That is 12 years working in hospitality, 12 years contributing to the industry, 12 years of service, but under traditional long service leave arrangements they may have

never qualified for the entitlement. That is the problem we are fixing, and fixing it will make these industries better.

A person who has studied to become a chef, who has perfected their skills as a bartender or who has trained in hairdressing will almost certainly change employers several times throughout their career. To be frank, they will commonly change employers through no fault of their own. These are industries characterised by business turnover. They still remain a chef, they still remain a bartender and they still remain a hairdresser. Changing employers does not mean changing careers. A chef does not stop being a chef because the restaurant they work for closes. A hairdresser does not lose their years of experience because they move to another salon. A bartender should not lose years of accumulated industry service simply because they have worked in three different venues. Their experience follows them, their skills follow them and under this government their long service entitlements will follow them too. That is the fundamental problem portable long service leave seeks to address.

I expect the Canberra Liberals will reject my characterisation of their view on these jobs. Instead, as they have done recently in the chamber, they will centre their longstanding opposition on this reform on broader concerns about the economy. They have done this every time we have expanded portable long service leave—every time, every industry and in every decade. It is like clockwork. They have been wrong every time as well.

I do not dismiss the pressures facing Canberra businesses. We know that businesses have been navigating significant challenges, including the impacts of overseas conflict on fuel, energy and supply chains. That is why we have deferred commencement ourselves, and that is why we are staging the introduction of the levy for the bulk of entrants. I have listened to businesses. It is why I have made the practical changes to the scheme's rollout and implementation that I have. There is a key difference between making a reform easier to implement and finding excuses not to implement it at all. The Canberra Liberals seem incapable of recognising that distinction.

In great timing, last week the opposition leader said that he had a bag of tricks that he would be bringing out in anticipation of 2028. This bill may provide some insight into what is inside that bag of tricks, because if it was not clear before, it is now irrefutable that the Canberra Liberals oppose the expansion of portable long service leave. Fundamentally, they just oppose it. If that is their position, I think Canberrans deserve to know just how far they intend to take it.

Portable long service leave is not some radical new experiment in the ACT or indeed in the country. Long service leave has been portable in the coal mining industry for nearly 80 years. In the ACT we have had a scheme for the construction industry for decades, which has then been extended onto cleaning, the community sector, as well as security. I would like the Canberra Liberals to explain something. Why is portable long service leave good enough for a construction worker but apparently too much to ask for for a chef? Why should a cleaner be able to move between employers and retain their entitlements but not a hairdresser? Why should a security guard have access to an entitlement that a bartender is denied? Either the Canberra Liberals accept the principle of portable long service leave or they do not. If they do not, they need to explain what that means for every other worker who currently benefits from it.

I do have some questions for those opposite. Is it just hospitality workers whose portable long service leave entitlements they want to scrap? What about cleaners? What about security guards? What about workers in the community sector? And what about construction workers? Are their portable long service leave entitlements at risk from the Canberra Liberals?

This is the most important one. Will the Canberra Liberals rule out scrapping this expansion or making any changes that would limit workers' access to portable entitlement schemes should they be elected in 2028? Workers in these industries deserve to know whether their long service entitlements are among the tricks the opposition leader has tucked away in his bag.

The Canberra Liberals opposed this expansion when it was legislated in 2022. Now, just two months before commencement, they are back trying to put another roadblock in its way. The ACT Labor government will not be deterred. A person who dedicates their working life to an industry deserves to have that service recognised. Whether they are building our homes, cleaning our workplaces, caring for our community, keeping us safe, preparing our meals or cutting our hair, their work matters, their service matters and their entitlements matter. The ACT Labor government is proud to stand up for these workers, and we do not support this bill.

MR PARTON (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (3.41): I absolutely support this bill because we support the small business economy and we support the workers that are in that economy. If you do not have a job in the industries that are covered here because a business cannot employ workers, then you do not have to worry about entitlements.

I attended a business round table that was put on by Mr Milligan in Belconnen a couple of weeks ago. In that conversation with a series of business owners I spoke to a health and beauty business owner in Belconnen. It is a small business. They have been going for eight or 10 years. For the most part they have been just a family business, but over that period of eight years they have on many occasions employed some casual staff. That business owner told me, "There is no way that we are ever employing staff again. We are not doing it because it's not going to work." That business owner cited specifically portable long service leave. The individuals who would have been employed by that business will not have to worry about entitlements because they will not be employed. Mr Pettersson has never run a business in his life. Given the way that his government spends money, if he ever did, I am sure it would be short-lived.

I was listening to ABC radio this morning and Mr Solly in his discussions with Lindbeck, the butcher in Queanbeyan. I know he is in Queanbeyan; he is outside of our jurisdiction. They were running through what it is like to run a small business in this region and that it is going to be a minimum of six days a week, probably seven, and that it is going to be at least 60 hours a week. That is just to get to the point that you are viable.

Business is absurdly difficulty in this town. I find it unfathomable that ministers of this government are wading around the Business Council of Australia's *Regulation Rumble* report, which somehow placed us at number 3, when they know full well that it is not

representative of what is going on on the ground. They absolutely know it. That report does not get you off the hook. That report of course does not take into account things like the commercial rates. It does not take into account the Secure Local Jobs Code and developer licensing. It does not take into account portable long service leave in these industries, because why would they ask questions about those things of businesses around Australia? Who would do that stuff? We would do it. They are among the reasons that is so difficult to run a business and make money in this great city of ours.

In answers to questions in the chamber I think yesterday, Mr Pettersson was asked by Mr Cocks, from memory, about what has changed to give him the belief that business is going to improve. Basically, I think he said—I know I am paraphrasing him, and he can make a point of order and take me on if he wants—that the weather is about to get warmer, and he thinks people are probably going to go out and drink at bars and things. I do not think that is enough. I do not believe that that is enough. We are going to have another interest rate rise on Melbourne Cup Day. Sorry, Mr Braddock, about the horseracing stuff. We are going to have another interest rate rise. We have got petrol at this ridiculous price. That is not the fault of this government, but it factors into how difficult it is to survive in business in this town. This government is about to make it even more difficult. I think it is shameful.

I applaud the consultation and all of the work that has been done by Mr Cocks and my team on this bill, and I absolutely support it.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (3.45): Just before I do start with my actual speech, Mr Parton, you are more than welcome to join our Nup to the Cup event, where we will be supporting the hospitality workers and having a fantastic time, which does not actually involve the whipping of animals, so there you go. It is a Greens fundraiser, so I am happy to buy you a ticket, if you would attend.

Coming back to the portable long service leave bill, shock horror, the Greens will not be supporting this bill. The Greens are supportive of portable long service leave, including in the accommodation, food and personal services industries. This reform we are debating today was legislated 3½ years ago and was originally due to be implemented in June last year. When it was first delayed by 15 months on assertions that the industries concerned were not ready, I warned that the Greens stood ready to disallow any attempts to delay it further.

The Greens have already been quite generous. Earlier this year Minister Pettersson, in the context of the fuel supply crisis, enacted a further six-month delay to the commencement and then a phased implementation over the following years. That phased implementation will now finally start on 1 January. In the economic circumstances I tolerated this call, but the patience has its limits.

This is pro-worker legislation. There are big business interests who will never claim they are ready for it nor willingly acknowledge that they operate in an industry that has erected structural barriers to people accessing their entitlements over the course of their careers, particularly long service leave. These reforms target those structural barriers by ensuring that workers in these industries can accrue the entitlements that they deserve regardless of whom exactly they are working for. The reforms also reward those businesses that look after their workers and support business cash flow.

By paying a consistent amount of money into a fund over time, the costs of long service leave are spread across the whole of the industry. The rates of contribution are estimated based on providing for future payments, meaning that the money being set aside is less than what would be needed to provision for every employee eventually taking long service leave. Despite the misinformation peddled by big business, the government does not and will not profit from the scheme.

This terrible bill is in fact a study of how you would kill off a scheme by placing it in permanent limbo. The circumstances that the bill prescribes to allow the scheme to proceed are constructed in a way designed to ensure they never arise.

A word of warning to the Labor government: there are big anti-worker interests out there who will never be satisfied with this reform package and who will seek to oppose it at every turn. The longer it goes unimplemented, the more often we are going to be coming back to debate it, and the more often it gets deferred, the more often I get to wonder whether the Labor party still cares about the workers.

MR MILLIGAN (Yerrabi) (3.48): I rise today in support of Mr Cocks's long service leave amendment bill. Over recent months I have heard from many local businesses, as have my colleagues, about the concerns about the expansion of the long service leave scheme happening here in the ACT. Portable long service has been a longstanding policy in certain industries in Canberra, particularly construction. What we are debating today is whether it is appropriate to expand the scheme to another industry and whether the government has enough evidence to support that change.

I have heard from local cafes, restaurants, community clubs, nightclubs, hairdressers and barbers, and they have all said how much they appreciate the support of their staff. Some of them say that they feel more like family. When it comes to the current long service scheme arrangements, there is no problem. Hospitality business owners are happy to take responsibility for long service leave when their employees work up the 10 years to be eligible for long service leave. What they are uncomfortable with is being responsible for leave accrued under another business. In other words, it feels like a scam.

The government will say that the scheme is working in other industries in the economy, but that is comparing apples with oranges. There is an important distinction here. The industries currently covered are largely project based, with workers moving between projects more so than businesses. That is not the case in the hospitality sector. A hairdresser does not start cutting someone's hair while working for one barber shop and finish the job while working for another.

The government originally tried to implement these changes earlier in the year. However, after an outcry from businesses in the community, the minister delayed the implementation of the scheme. An *ABC* article from March states that:

> ACT Business Minister Michael Pettersson said the scheme was good for businesses and workers, but the government would not introduce the expansion while local businesses faced financial difficulty.

I do not see how anyone could argue that local businesses are not facing a financial

difficulty now more than what they were back in March. Since the minister made that comment, many businesses have been hit with higher commercial rates, a reduced payroll tax threshold and a budget which increased several levies, fees and charges. The Canberra Business Chamber has declared that we are in a cost-of-doing-business crisis in the ACT. At the same time, consumer spending will remain low due to the federal Labor government's ongoing cost-of-living crisis. Inflation, fuelled by government spending, remains high, and experts are predicting that the RBA will increase interest rates again in the near future.

That is why I am supporting and supportive of the sensible and measured approach taken by my colleague Mr Cocks to make sure that the government gets the evidence before it can make this decision. The hospitality industry is incredibly important to Canberra. It provides many students with a flexible first job sensitive to their timetable. It provides places to dine with family and friends. I think it is fair to say that it keeps this place running, particularly the coffee shops around the Assembly during a sitting week that fill us full of caffeine to get through the long day. According to Treasury, accommodation and food services alone contribute over $1 billion to the territory's economy, employing over 17,000 people.

In conclusion, the government has not made a compelling case for why the hospitality industry should be forced into a scheme which was not designed for them. Local businesses have been clear and consistent about the cost pressures it would add, and the minister himself has previously acknowledged that the environment is not right.

The question I am asking myself is: if the government is so confident that this policy will help employers and employees, why don't they want an independent third-party review? Are they worried that their political spin will not stand up to scrutiny? This amendment is a sensible and measured solution to these problems, so I encourage all members here to support this amendment today.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (3.54): I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak to the private member's bill introduced by Mr Cocks seeking to prevent the expansion of the ACT's portable long service leave scheme. I will come back to that, but it is clearly what the bill would do if it were to pass. While I acknowledge the breadth of this expansion, my remarks will largely be focused on the hospitality industry, which has been at the centre of the public debate on this.

Having owned and operated a local small business until I came to this place two years ago, I know how hard it can be to run a thriving small business in this town. I know the feeling of pouring yourself into a business and wanting to provide your staff with the best possible entitlements yet never being able to take any real leave yourself, never taking public holidays off, always being the person who steps in to plug the gaps when your staff are on leave or fall ill, while not feeling able to take time off when you, as the business owner, fall ill. I also know the feeling of these experiences being pooh-poohed because many people think all small business owners are making a killing and that business turnover is the same as profit, without realising many small business owners are taking home less than their lowest paid staff.

I also learned one thing above all: the success of a small business is completely dependent on its staff—happy staff, happy life. I learned that being a good boss means

investing in your staff, wanting what is best for them, supporting a positive work-life balance and knowing that it is incredibly difficult for staff to bring everything they have got to their work if they are not happy in the workplace. When we get the balance right, what is best for employees is also what is best for our employers and vice versa. I also take the point that employees do not exist without someone who can employ them, someone who has taken the financial, personal and professional risk to have a crack and start their own thing. For me, this debate is about striking the right balance. I have got to admit I have gone back and forth on this one because the truth is that it is not a simple black-and-white issue, as convenient as it would be if it were.

Long service leave is an important workplace entitlement for all workers, including in the hospitality sector. The Australian Council of Trade Unions, in their submission to a 2015 federal senate committee into creating a national long service standard and the portability of long service and other entitlements, said:

> Long service leave is a basic workplace entitlement. It has existed in this country for over 150 years and in fact predates federation. However, despite long service leave being a well-established community standard, fundamental changes to the nature of work have created structural barriers that prevent equal access to it.

During that inquiry employee groups expressed concerns about the level of insecure work in Australia, pointing out that workers in some types of employment, including casual and non-ongoing employment, routinely miss out on long service leave entitlements and that in certain industries this is particularly the case. Of course, our labour market has changed significantly from the days where long service leave was an entitlement for colonial civil servants, referred to in this submission, who had six to 12 months of paid furlough after 10 years of service so they could sail back to Britain. This is at the core of what we are debating I think today and is at the crux of what this measure means for our community.

In 2024 I ran for election with the promise to advocate for people who feel forgotten. When it comes to the recent public debate on this issue, there has been a group that for some reason has not really had their voices heard or at least not amplified, and that is hospitality workers. Hospitality workers are some of the lowest paid in our community, and their roles are often precarious, taxing and stressful. In this debate I think especially about the unseen back-of-house staff, the cooks and kitchen hands who have been at it for years, pulling late shifts and double shifts to serve us, often to the detriment of their own health and wellbeing.

The hospitality industry is also the largest employer of young people, with almost half of all workers in this area being under the age of 25. Younger people also face a precarious labour market. According to the 2025 Australian Youth Barometer, 60 per cent of young people have experienced underemployment. Portable long service leave helps fix these inherent flaws of insecure work, like casual contracts or gig economy employment more broadly, by changing how workers accrue and receive benefits.

Canberra's hospitality workers and the businesses in which they work have contributed hugely to our thriving cultural scene, which is spearheaded by the success of our thriving food and beverage institutions, which we saw this week with Canberra punching well above our weight in the *Sydney Morning Herald*'s Good Food Guide

Awards. They have made our food and drink scene stand out and made it something for Canberrans to be proud of. I am constantly speaking in this place about the need to support that work and do more to increase the vibrancy of our cultural scene here.

I understand concerns around the design of the portable long service leave scheme, in particular in relation to the unique nature of the hospitality industry, and that many people working in the industry only intend to do so temporarily. Whether or not that ends up being the case is another question. Industry operators estimate that fewer than one in 10 hospitality workers stay in the sector long enough to qualify for long service leave. I have been consulting widely on this scheme, particularly with local independent operators, and have heard perspectives all the way from "This is a solution looking for a problem" to "I really support the intent of this policy, but I am not sure about the expected uptake rate and how it's being rolled out".

I also acknowledge it is a particularly tough time for the hospitality industry. We have seen this with the construction works in Civic leading to reduced foot traffic and lower trade. Coupled with inflation, rising interest rates and the rising cost of doing business, many of our favourite venues are struggling. This is why I have called for means-tested rates relief for businesses heavily impacted by the light rail works, with a mechanism to ensure that support gets passed on to tenants to help keep our hospitality sector afloat. As members know, a similar measure was recently recommended in the economics, industry and recreation committee's night-time economy inquiry report. It is tough for workers right now, and it is tough for business owners. Both these things can be true, and I think they are true.

When it comes to long service leave, many small business owners I have spoken with have said they want better entitlements for their staff and they want them to enjoy the benefits of long service leave. Many have also expressed concerns that the levy is too high and that the take-up across their teams will likely be far lower than anticipated. It is worth noting there is a lot of diversity across the hospitality industry, too, with the experience of a small independent pub differing significantly from that of a big community club or from a higher end restaurant.

Earlier this year, as has been discussed, the government deferred the expansion of the portable long service leave scheme until next January in recognition of the challenging economic climate, which is welcome. I also welcome that the government has listened and softened the entry point for food and beverage businesses, which will receive discounted levy rates over the first three years of the scheme. I also support the idea of an independent review into the scheme, as proposed by Mr Cocks in this bill. We should be looking closely at the impacts of this scheme on employment and business viability.

We also need to look closely at the appropriateness of the levy rate that has been chosen compared to assumed uptake rates of the scheme. I have been asking questions about this through briefings and questions on notice over recent months, and I have to admit that the evidence for the labour rate that has been selected seems pretty thin, so this warrants attention. I hope to see assurances from the ACT Leave Authority that, if appropriate, the levy will be reduced over time, and sooner rather than later if the assumptions of hospo businesses come to fruition as more data does get collected around projected uptake.

However, the threshold set out in Mr Cocks's bill is remarkably high—that the minister can only expand the portable long service leave to these new industries if an independent review concludes that the scheme is unlikely to cause material adverse effects on business viability or employment in the ACT. The reality is all workers rights are likely to have some impact on business viability and employment. The minimum wage, for example, is very likely to cause material adverse effects on business viability or employment. That is not sufficient justification not to have a minimum wage in this country.

Further, I do not think it is really appropriate to legislate that whether or not the measure is introduced will depend on the findings of an independent review, notwithstanding the safeguards in the bill regarding the reviewer. We should not be outsourcing our functions as legislators in such a manner. Our job in this place is to consider the trade-offs of policy decisions and legislate accordingly on that basis. It is clear there absolutely are trade-offs here—real trade-offs—and ultimately where I have landed is that, notwithstanding concerns with the design of the scheme, I, like many of the small business owners I have spoken with, support its intent, which is why I will not be supporting Mr Cocks's bill today. I do want to thank him for bringing it forward and for his part in driving this debate.

MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi) (4.03): As I understand it, this bill seeks to delay the implementation of portable long service leave for the hospitality and beauty industries for six months and requires the government to commission a study of the policy in the meantime. As a pro-business measure, I find this pretty underwhelming. All it does is briefly reduce the burden of a small tax for a small number of businesses.

I am sure the opposition will argue that the study will produce the evidence that forces the government to abandon long service leave completely, but I am not convinced. I think any study the government commissions will find whatever the government wants it to find. Even if there were a genuinely independent study that found the policy was suboptimal, I truly doubt it would lead to the policy's abolition. I do not oppose the bill, but I wish the opposition had drafted it with the courage of their convictions—and the minister touched on this. If they genuinely oppose the portable long service leave policy, just say so and bring on a bill that would expressly abolish the policy permanently for all industries. Tell us what you stand for and fight for it. That is what the federal opposition is doing. It is what the Victorian opposition is doing. Surely the ACT opposition can do it too.

I am happy to say what I stand for: I want Canberrans to flourish. That is why I stand for business. A dynamic, thriving business sector means competitively-priced products and services, which in turn means a lower cost of living. It means well-paid, secure jobs. It means opportunities for those who choose not to go to the ANU or do not want to go down the path of a public service grad program, but they want to enjoy meaningful, rewarding careers. It is the best vehicle that we have for economic and social mobility. But it is not something that we have here in Canberra.

The problem is not on the demand side. We have a medium-sized population and the highest incomes in the country. Canberrans frequently travel to Sydney and Melbourne for the things they cannot get here in Canberra. Our problem sits on the supply side—the fact is that we need more private sector investment. We do not get enough of it,

because the returns are not large enough to cover the cost of capital. The potential revenue is there. It is just that the costs of operating a business in the ACT are prohibitively high.

What are the costs? There is the regulation, taxation and real estate. The regulatory burden here is more immense. I do not believe anyone in government can tell you the cumulative burden they impose on local businesses. The taxation burden is immense as well. You have commercial property taxes, payroll taxes, stamp duty, marketing levies and a bunch of ad-hoc taxes, levies and fees as well—all of which are going up every single year. We can include portable long service leave in this category because it is really just another business tax. Then you have real estate. If you need industrial space, you are plumb out of luck in this town. What we have here is fully utilised, and the SLA has zero new industrial land slated for release in the next five years. On the other hand, we have plenty of unused commercial space around town. But, if you need to redevelop it, you are in for a long and bad time with our planning and DA systems, especially if there is a tree or a legless lizard within cooee of your project.

There are essential problems and these are what we need to address if we want a thriving business sector. It is not good enough to briefly delay one small tax on one small part of the ACT economy. That will not make enough of a difference to revitalise the private sector or help to bring down the cost of living. We need to go straight to the heart of the problem and start there. That is what this bill and this debate should have been about, because it is what the business sector and everyday Canberrans need.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (4.07): This debate highlights a genuine tension between supporting workers' entitlements and recognising the pressures facing small business. On one hand, many hospitality businesses, community clubs and other employers have raised concerns about additional costs, cash flow impacts, workforce turnover and the complexity of administering the scheme, particularly where employees undertake mixed duties. These concerns are legitimate and deserve to be taken seriously.

On the other hand, the objective of portable long service leave is an important one. Workers in industries such as hospitality, accommodation and beauty services often move between employers as part of normal career progression. Under traditional long service leave arrangements, many workers never access an entitlement they have spent years accruing, simply because they change jobs. Portable long service leave addresses that problem by allowing workers to accrue service across multiple employers within the same industry. I acknowledge the concerns that some workers may not remain in the industry long enough to qualify for long service leave. However, the answer is not to continue delaying the scheme indefinitely. The question should be whether workers who do build long careers in these industries have a genuine opportunity to access the same entitlement available to workers in other sectors.

Importantly, the government has already recognised the pressures facing businesses. The scheme has been phased in, with concessions available in the first three years, and implementation has been delayed until at least 2027 to provide additional time for businesses to prepare and transition. The levy is not fixed forever. It will be reviewed regularly and adjusted based on actual uptake of the scheme. If fewer workers than expected remain in the industry long enough to access long service leave, levy rates in theory can be reduced accordingly. The cost of the scheme should be informed by

evidence about how many workers ultimately qualify for the entitlement, rather than assumptions made before the scheme has commenced. I agree that implementation should continue to be monitored carefully and that we should keep looking at ways to improve how the scheme operates with reviews as appropriate, particularly for workers with shorter industry careers and for employers with complex workforce arrangements.

Those are important policy questions, but I do not believe they justify another legislative delay. Workers in hospitality, accommodation and beauty services deserve the same opportunities to access long service leave as workers in other industries already covered by portable schemes. This bill would simply postpone that outcome once again. For those reasons, I will be opposing the bill and supporting the continued rollout of portable long service leave in these industries. I thank Mr Cocks for bringing this bill forward.

MS BERRY (Ginninderra) (4.10): I rise to briefly speak to this bill and the portable long service leave scheme and particularly go back in time to when the cleaning industry were successful in advocating for portable long service leave. It was implemented in this government by a prominent Labor politician, Wayne Berry. I remember the day very well. It was in December 1999. Cleaners filled the gallery—lots of migrant cleaners, lots of female cleaners and lots of students. They were here to celebrate the time when their voices were finally heard by decision-makers in this town. I remember the day. The government was in minority—it was the Liberal government at the time—and, when the bill was introduced and voted on, Liberal Party members turned their backs and left the chamber. It was a very clear signal to the cleaners in this town that there was no care for the important work that they do in keeping our city—including the buildings of businesses in this town and, particularly, hospitality business—clean and safe so that we can all work. While that was a significant day for Canberra's invisible workers—who, as I said, for the first time, felt that they were being seen—I think it was also as important for hospitality workers, who are also often seen as invisible workers. I worked in hospitality for eight years. It is not as glamorous, as easy or as fun as people might make it out to be. The least that they should expect is to be respected and paid their legal entitlements, which includes long service leave.

I am not anti-business by any means. I absolutely respect the position that Leanne Castley has taken in this place. At least she is clear on it, and she has always taken that position, from day one. She will not agree with what I am saying right now, because my voice has always been to bring the voices of low-paid workers into this building and into the decision-making processes about their rights and conditions, and that goes towards portable long service leave as well. I know that it makes a difference. It makes a difference to the respect and value that we place on the workers who are the cogs in the machine that keep this city going. It makes a huge difference to the lives of those workers and to their families that they are seen as legitimate, as respected and as valued workers—who may not have the same kinds of education experiences, who may not have the same experiences that any of us would have in this place, particularly those who are migrant workers who may not be citizens of this town, who are also entitled to get those conditions. The same could be said for hospitality workers as well.

I absolutely 100 per cent support portable long service leave expanding to those workforces who need them. I stand by my commitment to those workers to make sure that they are paid, respected and valued and are not having their wages or conditions

stolen or diminished in any way but are being expanded to have the same kinds of chances at a good, happy life like the rest of us. I am not surprised that the Canberra Liberals, given their history with regard to portable long service leave, have taken the position that they have today. But I think it is important that every worker in this town, in those positions that we are supporting to expand portable long service leave, hear that and know that the ACT Labor government that will continue to expand their conditions so that they get that chance at a good and happy life.

MRS MORRIS (Brindabella) (4.14): I rise to speak in support of Mr Cocks's bill. Canberra businesses are doing it very, very tough—and, if businesses are doing it tough, then workers will do it tough. Mr Cocks gets that, and that is what his bill is all about. Obviously, the government do not get that, because at every turn they seem intent on crushing our local businesses. If our local businesses cannot survive, then our workers are going to really struggle in this town.

The cost of business in Canberra keeps climbing. That is the reality. When businesses are already operating on thin margins, every single additional cost matters. Let's be clear: nobody wants workers missing out on entitlements that they have earned. But this government seems to think that every well-intended regulation comes without a price tag. That is just a fallacy; it is not true. Someone pays—whether it is the family who are paying more for the food that they eat, whether it is the worker whose hours are cut or whether it is the person who will never get that job in the first place, because the local business simply cannot afford to bring on more staff.

I recently met with a local hospitality business owner in my electorate, and he told me that he has been forced to reduce his payroll by 10 positions in recent years. This is a local business that has been entrenched in our community for decades. Their staff are like family to them, and it hurts them when they have to let their staff go. They care and worry about their futures but, if there is no money to go around and pay these staff, they have no choice but to let them go—and it hurts them to do that.

Labor is ushering in changes that too many local businesses in this industry simply cannot afford to sustain, and the impact of that will be on the workers that this government says it cares about. It is very hard to see where that care is if more and more workers are going to be laid off. In fact, Minister Pettersson said in his own remarks: "We need more of these workers. We need more of these workers." You said that, Minister Petterson, didn't you?

Mr Pettersson: I very much did.

MRS MORRIS: The consequence of the policies that your government is driving will be fewer workers, not more workers. That is the consequence. It could mean the student at Lake Tuggeranong College misses out on their first job, their first pay packet, and the opportunity to learn some independence. It could mean a single parent losing a few hours of work or an entire shift that they desperately need to help them pay the rent and put food on the table. These are real people, real Canberrans, real families, real livelihoods.

We hear so much from this government about human rights—human rights of those businesses who are quite happy to engage in illicit affairs, selling illegal tobacco. If

only this government could spare the same level of consideration for those businesses who are slugging their guts, working their hardest, operating perfectly legitimate businesses, trying to keep their doors open and their staff employed. If only this government could spare the same level of consideration for those businesses as it does for those illegal ones who have their human rights to do illegal things, apparently, according to this government.

Protecting workers also means protecting their opportunities to work, and that is what this government does not understand. Every additional regulation has a cost. The question is whether the government have properly considered that cost and who ultimately pays. If they have considered that cost, then they obviously do not care that this could mean fewer workers in Canberra.

Mr Cocks's bill is sensible and it is measured. Every single Canberra business deserves to be heard. Hardworking Canberrans deserve an opportunity to earn a living. That is effectively the future that Mr Cocks's bill has sought to achieve for so many local businesses. I commend it to the Assembly.

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (4.20), in reply: I present a revised explanatory statement to the bill. I would never suggest that the minister was misleading with his speech or that he might be engaging in fearmongering, but there is absolutely a degree of misdirection. I should not be surprised, because I know he loves the politics of this. The Labor Party were founded on the principle of the worker versus the business. That is what they were founded on. That is what they know. That is the way they think the world works. But that is not the way you actually achieve success.

The way we actually move things forward in this place, in the ACT, the way we move beyond a territory where 98 per cent of the growth in the economy has been entirely due to government spending, is by recognising that you cannot have one without the other. You cannot have a successful business unless you have good, successful workers. Mr Emerson reflected on this, and I quite respected a lot of what he had to say. I think he has come to the wrong conclusion, but I appreciate that he has weighed the factors and he has come out on one side. But, what we have got from this Labor Party, this Labor government, is simply ideology without the facts to back it up.

I think there is a very important role for considering history here. The minister wants to talk about, "There are only two months until this is meant to come in," but I brought this bill to this place in May. I announced that the bill was coming and, quick as a flash, the minister got out there and announced that he was going to delay things by six months anyway. I think the delays themselves are very important to recognise. The government have, at stages, recognised that their portable long service leave—their hospitality and services tax—would indeed have an impact on the viability of businesses at a time when our economy is in trouble. It is in trouble—and some sectors more than others.

What I fear is that the various sectors which the minister's expansion of this scheme hits worst are some of the most vulnerable in our city. If you have a look at recent reporting on the numbers from Creditor Watch, you will find that in, Australia, around 12.03 per cent—nearly one in eight cafes, restaurants and takeaway outlets—or around 3,910 businesses across Australia closed in the 12 months leading up to July 2026. It is a remarkable failure rate. It is nearly double the national average across all industries—

and the national average is not doing great across all industries either. But this is the sector that the minister will target.

What we understand that the government does not is that this is not about turnover. It is not about staffing budgets. You can only afford more costs if you have a profit to use. Profit margins in this sector have fallen from 10 per cent—not great—to 2.5 per cent. By some measures they are talking about two per cent profit margins. If you assume a 2.5 per cent profit margin and you have a million-dollar-turnover business, it sounds pretty successful. That means you are taking home 25 grand in a year. It is a million-dollar business and you get $25,000. For a cafe or a beauty services business, odds are that means that the owner of the business, who is probably working in the business, is taking home 25 grand. Based on the sorts of numbers that we know that staffing makes up in that sector, the implementation of this measure would take away nearly five grand of that—nearly a fifth of the profit that the business owner would be taking home for all of the work that they put in.

What Labor does not get is that that does not just affect the business owner, though; that also affects the worker. If the government is busy taking an extra one per cent tax—just one per cent—none of that money can actually go to a worker. The businesses who so desperately want to be able to give their workers a pay rise to encourage them to stick around, to encourage them to keep going, now cannot. They would love to be able to pay more than minimum wage, but suddenly they cannot. This is what the government does not get. This is what Labor does not get.

So, absolutely, we have opposed this at every turn—absolutely we have—because it is a tax on jobs and workers. Not a dollar of the money that the employer has to pay follows the workers—not a dollar. We know this because the government has insourced—and I am glad that Ms Berry brought up cleaners—a bunch of cleaners. When we asked about the insourcing process and the impact on portable long service leave earlier in the year in estimates, we found that, "No; those people do not get to take their portable long service leave. They basically reset under the government scheme." They get to take normal long service leave but portable long service leave disappears. There are special provisions if they happen to go out within a defined, narrow period of time. But the dirty little secret is that what is good for the private sector is not good enough for the public sector. The same rules do not apply.

The government also do not want to talk about the fact that, when they expand this scheme to the hospitality industry, what they are going to do is they will group hospitality workers in with those cleaners. When it comes to the contributions on behalf of hospitality workers, we know from data that up to 98 per cent may not reach the threshold to qualify. If you put those two groups of employees into the same scheme, though some of them might decide to stick around, essentially what we are going to do is see is that those hospitality workers, those young workers who are working throughout their university time or who are working to get them through all sorts of conditions, subsidising the cleaners and other workers who are much more likely to stick around—because the government have put them into the same scheme.

This is what the government do not realise. You cannot turn this into "worker versus business". It is not about "worker versus business". We do not support portable long service leave. We opposed it when they sought to expand it. I am sure we will continue

to oppose it. But, in this specific case, what we thought was, "Well, the Assembly came to a conclusion on portable long service leave expansion. The government, though, is looking to implement that expansion when it threatens the very viability of a huge number of businesses and threatens the livelihoods of a huge number of workers." At least we should be able to expect the government to present some sort of evidence. But this minister, it turns out, is an evidence-free zone. We saw that throughout question time this week. When asked about the evidence relied upon, all he had was ideology. All he had was talking points and Labor tropes—no evidence; nothing that says that the economy is actually in a better position than it was previously; nothing that suggested that there would be no impact on workers; nothing.

I provided plenty of notice of this. The government knew this was on its way back in May—all the way back in May. You would think that, knowing this debate was on its way, knowing that the economy was not doing so crash hot, knowing that there was a risk to business, they might have gone and done a little bit of homework between then and now. But they have not. All they are doing is relying on a unanimity of ideology between them and the Greens—who, to be fair, were founded on some very similar class struggle principles, at least in some of their links. All they are doing is allowing ideology to override a sensible, practical, measurable response. We did not want this to pass, but it passed.

Member interjecting—

MR COCKS: They have nothing but snide interjections and ideology—and their approach is going to hurt. We will absolutely, Minister—through you, Mr Deputy Speaker—assess whether this needs to be repealed should we see over the coming years more failures, more cutting back of worker hours and more cuts to employee salaries. We will absolutely look at whether this bad expansion needs to be repealed. Absolutely we will look at that. But it needs to be based on some sort of evidence. You cannot just apply a new tax to a whole new sector of the economy and expect it to just tick along.

If we see more closures, it is on this minister's head. It is on this government's head. They are the ones who have pushed this through. It sounds like this bill will be defeated today. They should know that every person who loses a job because of this decision is their fault.

Question put:

> That the bill be agreed to in principle.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes, 8	Noes, 15	
Chiaka Barry	Andrew Barr	Marisa Paterson
Peter Cain	Yvette Berry	Michael Pettersson
Leanne Castley	Andrew Braddock	Chris Steel
Ed Cocks	Fiona Carrick	Rachel Stephen-Smith
Jeremy Hanson	Jo Clay	Caitlin Tough
Elizabeth Lee	Thomas Emerson	Rebecca Vassarotti

James Milligan	Laura Nuttall	Taimus Werner-Gibbings
Deborah Morris	Suzanne Orr	

Question resolved in the negative.

Bill negatived.

Housing—Housing ACT targets

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (4.38): I seek leave to amend my motion on the notice paper in the terms circulated in my name.

Leave granted.

MS CARRICK: I move the amended motion:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

(a) access to safe, secure and affordable housing is fundamental to individual wellbeing and community participation;

(b) ACT Shelter's analysis of the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare's data shows that housing affordability is now the leading driver of homelessness demand, that the ACT has the highest rate of persistent homelessness in Australia and that many people seeking assistance have complex support needs;

(c) Housing ACT has identified chronic homelessness and chronic rough sleeping as ongoing challenges requiring targeted intervention;

(d) at 30 June 2026, there were 588 vacant public housing dwellings, including 285 requiring maintenance, upgrades or insurance works;

(e) the proportion of public housing relative to the ACT population has declined over time and the proportion of vacant houses has increased over time; and

(f) increasing public housing supply and reducing vacancy times are critical to improving outcomes for vulnerable Canberrans;

(2) further notes that:

(a) the Government committed to increasing the Housing ACT portfolio to 13,200 dwellings by 2030 in the 2024 election;

(b) an increase of 1,469 houses is required from the June 2024 stock of 11,731 dwellings, with recent annual additions to the stock being:

(i) 142 additions to June 2025, 11,873 dwellings; and

(ii) 145 additions to June 2026, 12,018 dwellings;

(c) 263 additions are required per annum over four and a half years to 2030;

(d) the May 2026 *ACT Housing Strategy Year 7 Report Card* states that work has commenced on a comprehensive plan to guide investment required to grow the Housing ACT portfolio to 13,200 homes by 2030; and

(e) there are no publicly available annual delivery targets or milestones that enable the Assembly and the community to determine whether the Government is on track to meet its commitment; and

(3) calls on the Government to:

(a) publish, by 30 April 2027, the comprehensive plan to guide investment required to grow the Housing ACT portfolio to 13,200 homes by 2030, including the indicative:

(i) annual dwelling delivery targets to 2030;

(ii) number of homes to be constructed, purchased and renewed each year;

(iii) program the additional dwellings will be delivered under;

(iv) district-level delivery projections; and

(v) risks to delivery, including reliance on Commonwealth funding;

(b) publish, by 31 May 2027, a plan to return all vacant public housing properties to service as quickly as possible, including "hard to let";

(c) for the 2027-2028 Budget, include:

(i) the indicative annual dwelling delivery targets to 2030; and

(ii) accountability indicators for the average vacancy period for each category of vacant houses, such as maintenance or upgrade targets of 90 days or less;

(d) map, by 31 May 2027, existing housing, homelessness and support services for people experiencing chronic homelessness, identifying service gaps across Canberra; and

(e) report back to the Assembly by the last sitting day of June, annually until 2030, progress towards the 13,200 dwelling target, vacancy reductions and gaps in homelessness services.

As we all know, a home is more than a roof over someone's head; it is the foundation on which people build their lives. It provides safety, stability, health, connection to community and opportunities for education and employment. But, in the ACT, we face growing housing challenges. We know that increasing housing supply and returning vacant houses to service help to meet this housing challenge.

ACT Shelter's analysis of the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare's data shows that housing affordability is now the leading driver of homelessness demand. It also shows that the ACT has the highest rate of persistent homelessness in Australia and that many people seeking assistance have complex needs, including mental health challenges. These are not isolated issues. They are challenges that require both housing and support services. Housing ACT has identified chronic homelessness and chronic rough sleeping as ongoing challenges. We know demand for public housing continues to increase and we know the proportion of public housing relative to our growing population has steadily declined. We know there were 588 vacant Housing ACT dwellings at 30 June 2026, including 285 requiring maintenance, upgrades or insurance works.

I welcome the government's commitment to grow the Housing ACT portfolio to 13,200 dwellings by 2030. More public housing is desperately needed. But an end target is not

a delivery plan. The government made this commitment during the 2024 election. Since then, the ACT Housing Strategy Year 7 Report Card advised that work had commenced on a comprehensive plan to guide the investment required to achieve that target. Yet today the Assembly cannot answer a very simple question: where is that comprehensive plan and are we on track? To achieve 13,200 dwellings by 2030, Housing ACT must add 1,469 homes from the June 2024 baseline. Recent growth in the stock has been 142 homes in 2024-25 and 145 homes in the 2025-26. To reach the target, the government will need to deliver approximately 263 additional dwellings every year until 2030. I note that the minister's amendment reports higher annual numbers, but these are the additions to show the level of activity. They do not include the sales and demolitions. They are the gross numbers not the net numbers that reflect the actual stock held by Housing ACT.

The first call in this motion asks the government to publish a single comprehensive plan setting out the annual number of homes it expects to construct, purchase and renew each year, the programs through which those homes will be delivered and the risks that could affect delivery. This is not an unreasonable request. Every major infrastructure project has milestones and timelines throughout project delivery. Housing should be no different. Publishing annual targets would allow this Assembly, the community sector and the public to assess whether delivery is occurring at the pace required to reach 13,200 homes by 2030. It would move the debate from aspiration to accountability.

The second call relates to vacant public housing. Every vacant home is a missed opportunity. A vacant property could instead house a family on the waiting list, a woman fleeing violence, a person sleeping rough, an older Canberran experiencing housing insecurity or a young person. The government reports the number of vacant properties, but there is no publicly available plan showing how and when those homes will be returned to service. This motion calls for precisely that: a plan to return all suitable vacant properties, including the hard-to-let properties, to use as quickly as possible. Greater transparency in this area benefits everyone. It helps identify bottlenecks, prioritise resources and ensure that existing public housing stock is being used effectively before taxpayers are asked to fund additional housing supply.

The third call strengthens accountability through the budget papers. Budget papers are where governments tell the community what they intend to deliver and how success will be measured. If the government is serious about reaching 13,200 homes, the annual dwelling targets to 2030 should appear in the ACT Housing budget statement. I note that, on 16 September 2026, this Assembly supported Mr Emerson's motion for Housing ACT's accountability indicators for higher occupancy rates and a 90-day turnaround time for homes requiring maintenance or upgrades. Those accountability indicators in Housing ACT's annual report and budgets has already been agreed. So thank you, Mr Emerson. This motion builds on that principle by seeking reporting across all categories of vacancy—because, as the saying goes, what gets measured gets managed.

The fourth element of the motion focuses on chronic homelessness. Housing is essential but for many people experiencing chronic homelessness, housing alone is not enough. People often require access to food, mental health services, alcohol and other drug support, family violence support and outreach services. If we are serious about reducing chronic homelessness, we need to know whether these services exist, where they are

needed and where the gaps are. For example, I am very keen to know what crisis accommodation and what food pantry support are in Canberra's south. That is why this motion calls for a mapping exercise of housing and homelessness services across the ACT. This would provide evidence to guide future investment rather than relying on assumptions. Finally, the motion calls for annual reporting to the Assembly until 2030. Annual reporting of targets allows this Assembly and the community to monitor progress, identify emerging risks, assess vacancy reductions and understand whether service gaps are being addressed.

Importantly, this motion does not ask the government to change its target; it asks the government to publish the plan, publish the annual targets for each year to 2030, report on the reduction in vacancies, identify homelessness service gaps and provide regular updates on progress. This is simply a transparency and accountability motion. I commend the motion to the Assembly.

MS BARRY (Ginninderra) (4.46): I thank Ms Carrick for this motion. It is a very sensible motion. When I read the motion I was like, "Damnit; I should have brought that one." It shows that it is a collective effort and we are all really committed to ensuring that the most vulnerable in our community have the housing they need when they need it. So I thank you again for this motion. I will keep my comments really brief. The motion is quite simple and it is uncontroversial. The government have told us that they will grow the public housing stock by 13,200 dwellings by 2030. This motion simply calls on the government to report how they would be tracking against those targets each year. It also ensures greater transparency in the responses that we receive to the questions we ask. I understand that this is not an easy portfolio. There are no easy fixes. But motions like this go towards everyone making sure that we have our eyes on the ball and that that target is not missed.

Canberrans would be forgiven for taking this government's promises with a grain of salt, particularly when it comes to public housing. We have heard story after story of people's inability to get into public housing. I think it would be safe to say that every member in this, as I have indicated, wants the government to get this promise over the line by 2030. But, again, I do not think any of us is holding our breath. There are few measures that are more effective at pushing government action than public accountability, and that is all that this motion is asking for. It simply asks the government once a year to update the chamber on how it is tracking against its own target—we did not set that target—because the most vulnerable people in our city will suffer if the commitment is not realised.

Recently I was contacted by the parent of a young women who, after leaving a domestic violence relationship, has been waiting for over a year for public housing. Just last week I was contacted by a friend of a 21-year-old woman who has been forced into homelessness while waiting on the public housing waitlist. These are real people—real people that the government is failing. Public housing is a hand up for when you are down so that you can reengage, reconnect and continue to contribute to society. When it does not deliver on its commitment to increase Canberra's public housing, the government is letting vulnerable people down. For these vulnerable cohorts, it is a whole lot more than just a policy commitment; it is their entire quality of life.

The motion also calls for the government to make a plan for hard-to-let properties. I can

think of one—for example, the Illawarra Court complex in Belconnen. If you walk through that housing complex, you wonder how a normal human being would want to live in that complex. These properties, for any number of reasons, sit vacant over long periods, because of prospective tenants' objections to moving into those properties. That is saying something. When desperate members of the community who are, for years, waiting for properties are turning them down, it tells you how terrible the properties are—that you would rather be homeless than live in a place like that I have mentioned. It says a lot.

I am contacted every day by public housing tenants whose living conditions are hard to even fathom. In a supposedly progressive government, in a supposedly wealthy city, it is quite appalling to hear some of the stories of how people live. It can bring you to tears sometimes, Deputy Speaker, as I am sure that you have been on a number of occasions. I have been contacted by a tenant who, for months, had to tiptoe around buckets of full of water, splashed across her living room, to catch rainfall coming through holes in her ceilings from where the roof had fallen through. Another tenant was given the keys to move into their housing property, only to be told that their toilets needed replacing urgently. The tenant had to call Housing ACT five times to try and get those issues fixed.

It is not what we are debating here, but it shows you why, oftentimes, most tenants reject properties. It is really not good enough for this government to brush these properties under the carpet, as though there is nothing to see there, when there are over 3,500 people on the waitlist, some of whom are children and some of whom are very vulnerable people who have fled domestic and family violence. The government could not tell us the numbers today. I do not expect the minister to have every number at their fingertips, but these are actually very significant cohorts of people and I would think that, if you have 3,500 people on the waiting list, you would be able to tell me how many of them are children. We cannot afford to simply accept that those properties will sit vacant and that there is nothing that can be done. So I commend Ms Carrick again for calling the government out on this and forcing them to provide a solution.

Finally, the motion calls for the government to map the homelessness support sector to identify gaps in support for people who are chronically homeless. Again, this is a tough area. I understand the complexities that surround homelessness, but I also recognise that we cannot just ignore that sector. It is never going to be a waste of time to take a closer look at the sector to see whether there are opportunities for us to do better.

Once again, I thank Ms Carrick for the motion. The opposition will be supporting both her amendments and the government's amendments, as they are really just stating facts.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (4.52): I thank Ms Carrick for bringing forward this eminently sensible motion today. We have talked a lot about housing this sitting fortnight—as we should—and I think in a really productive way. So I will try to be brief with my remarks, as well. I strongly support this motion. At its core, it is about ensuring we have a clear plan for the delivery of an existing government commitment and, crucially, that that plan is actually properly funded and taken into account in the budget, so that we, as a parliament, can be confident it will be acted upon or, if not, take corrective action along the way.

We cannot get to 2029 and realise we are far short of where we need to be. Housing takes time. Building back up our public housing stock so that it is a more substantial part of our overall housing stock will not happen overnight. That is why establishing clear, annual delivery targets and measurable milestones is both appropriate and necessary. It provides an easy and transparent framework for us to track progress year by year, ensuring we stay on track rather than scrambling as we near the finishing line and, importantly, allow us to adjust if we do find ourselves off track.

As members know, the government is committed to growing the Housing ACT portfolio to 13,200 dwellings by 2030. That commitment is important, and I commend the government for making it, even though we know it is not enough to meet the level of need for subsidised housing across our community. We need to be realistic about the scale of the challenge here and where we are currently at. Firstly, our housing market is in crisis. I spoke to this last week in my remarks about the public housing OPD co-sponsored with Ms Vassarotti, saying that the housing system, especially our public housing system, is failing Canberrans and, regarding public housing, it is failing Canberrans who need help the most.

Secondly, to the target: while I really do appreciate the government for putting forward this target and for the increase in funding in the previous budget, which should be mentioned, 13,200 dwellings is simply not going to be enough to meet the full depth of public housing demand across our city. This must be a starting point and, whenever we talk about this issue, we also need to acknowledge that. But given that, even to reach that starting benchmark, we need to ensure that there is dedicated funding year on year and clear delivery pathways that are assessed against this commitment. I note that this was recommended also by the estimates committee this year. It recommended that the ACT government table in the Assembly by the end of 2026 a planned timeline demonstrating its pathway to grow the Housing ACT portfolio to 13,200 dwellings. That recommendation was noted. So I am glad Ms Carrick is bringing this forward and saying, no, this is actually something the Assembly expects the government to do.

We also know we have vacant homes across Canberra that need to be brought back into service as quickly as possible. With a comprehensive plan to guide investment and annual targets and providing regular updates back to this Assembly, we can work to ensure this is done faster and better than what has been done previously, because what has happened so far has not lived up to the expectations of our community.

I also want to briefly touch on call 3(d) of the motion, which is to map existing housing and homelessness services. This is a really important call, and I thank Ms Carrick for including it in her motion. As we all know, the ACT has the highest rate of persistent homelessness in the country. If you become homeless here, you are more likely to remain homeless than you would be anywhere else in Australia. In 2023 to 2024, almost 1,000 children between the ages of 12 to 17 received assistance from our homelessness services. To put that into perspective, based on the ACT school census of 2024, there were roughly 35,000 children in that age range. One in 35 kids between 12 and 17 accessed a homelessness service that year in the ACT. Surely this number is worse this year. It is not good enough. That is a sign that this place is failing to do its job. Much like I mentioned in our discussion about hard-to-let public housing, that system is failing to help those who most need our help, and any motion, piece of legislation or debate that we have in this place that seeks to fill the gaps in the services responsible

for looking after for our most vulnerable community members, as this motion does, is something that must be supported and commended.

This motion from Ms Carrick is about pushing the government and supporting the government to succeed in delivering these vital homes and services for our community. By requesting a clear plan today, we give the government and this Assembly, on behalf of our community, the best possible chance to meet the targets that have been set and build a stronger public housing system for the ACT.

So, again, I thank Ms Carrick for bringing forward this motion and will very gladly support it. I also want to acknowledge and thank her for her constructive engagement over the last couple of weeks and throughout this week on amendments across the Assembly that have now been agreed between her and the government, which I am very pleased to hear. So I am happy to support this motion with the amendments.

MS VASSAROTTI (Kurrajong) (4.57): I rise today to support Ms Carrick's motion regarding the ACT government's efforts to increase the number of public housing properties in the ACT. I have spoken many times in this chamber about my view that increasing the level of public housing stock in the ACT should be one of the highest priorities for this government.

We are in a housing crisis, with the cost of living becoming increasingly unaffordable for ordinary people. The private market has failed to deliver the housing we so desperately need. Over decades governments at both the national and local level have abdicated their responsibilities around public housing. We have seen a significant decline in the investment to grow stock, with us seeing the proportion of housing stock reduce from around 12 per cent in the 1990s to less than six per cent now. This has occurred during a period of skyrocketing private rents and increasing unaffordability. It is an indictment of public leadership.

I will continue to advocate for the government to be an active participant in the housing market. For far too long we have left it to the private market. Particularly in relation to the rental market, it is clear that this has left so many people in significant housing stress. We need to invest in public housing so we move from this type of housing of being a landlord of last resort to being a landlord of choice. We want public housing to be a common and usual option. This will support a more viable business model for public housing as well.

The current commitment to increasing our local public housing stock to 13,200 by 2030 is important. Let me be clear: I still believe this is not even going close enough. I remain dismayed by the lack of ambition by this government and concerned that the government has pretty well given up on a way to respond to the more than 3,600 people that are currently on the waiting list—our neighbours desperate to be able to access safe and affordable places to call home.

As government progressed the Growing and Renewing program through the last term, it was incredibly challenging to track progress against the program, even while holding part of the housing portfolio and sitting within cabinet. There were real challenges faced by the program, particularly around cost and supply change. I acknowledge those challenges. Building housing is not necessarily simple work, but it is very important

that we understand the commitment made by government and we track it. It was important then, and it remains important now.

I welcome Ms Carrick's motion, which aims to give the Assembly much stronger visibility on how the government is tracking in achieving their commitments around delivering more public housing. It is an issue that the Assembly has continued to raise, including through the estimates report that was delivered earlier this year. In the exchange that we had with housing officials in estimates midyear it did demonstrate how challenging it is to keep track of where we are up to. It is important to understand the acquisitions that are currently underway and the houses that are yet to be funded. It became really clear through this process that we have hundreds of properties that need to be delivered to meet the target and that the funding has not yet been identified to deliver these homes. This is something we need to understand and we need to scrutinise, and this motion will help us understand how the government is performing.

This motion builds on the motion that I worked on with Mr Emerson last week, so I really thank Ms Carrick for building on that work so we continue to particularly look at the forward plan. I would like to thank her for the constructive way that she has worked with me, my office and other members around the Assembly and acknowledge the work that has been done by the minister's office to get amendments as well. We will be supporting those amendments as well as Ms Carrick's amended motion.

Public housing matters. It matters because a safe, secure, affordable home is the foundation for a good life. It is where people raise families, recover from hardship, maintain connections to community and build a future. Thank you for bringing this motion to the floor of the Assembly.

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) (5.02): I seek leave to move my amendments.

Leave granted.

MS ORR: I move:

1. In paragraph (1)(d), omit "requiring", substitute: "undergoing".
2. After all text in paragraph (2)(e), insert new paragraph:

"(2A) further notes that:

(a) as part of its commitment to grow the Housing ACT portfolio to 13,200 homes by 2030 the ACT Government has delivered:

(i) 230 homes in 2024-25; and

(ii) 177 homes in 2025-26;

(b) at 1 July 2026, more 364 properties in various stages of design and construction, as part of the Growing and Renewing Public Housing Program, Housing Australia Future Fund Round 2, and the Social Housing Accelerator

Program; and

(c) in addition to the homes outlined in (2A)(a) and (b), the ACT Government has committed over $360 million as part of the 2026-27 Budget to establish a new Public Housing Pipeline program, funding the construction and purchasing of an additional 450 new public homes, and;

(i) investment in this program results in a forecast stock position at the end 2028-29 of approximately 12,800, leaving a circa 400-dwelling gap to reach the target of 13,200 homes by 2030;

(ii) to achieve the 2030 target and mitigate inherent uncertainty the Government is using a hybrid delivery model for the Public Housing Pipeline program – combining new builds on greenfield land, redevelopment of existing sites, and market acquisitions – to accelerate delivery and response to market conditions;

(iii) this approach provides the Government flexibility to maximise opportunities for investment n the delivery of the remaining homes.".

I thank all the members for their contributions today. I do also want to recognise, in working this up with Ms Carrick, her willingness to engage in the detail and the complexity of this portfolio, and the amendments that she has moved reflect feedback from me and my office in the interests of providing information what is actually achievable to be provided and in a format and in a way that also starts to paint that picture that members are seeking.

I think one thing, since taking on this portfolio, that has become very apparent to me and has been mentioned by a few people already in the debates is that this is a very, very complex task, managing 12,000-plus homes and a portfolio of that many homes and all the things that come from that, adding on to that additional properties through many different forms of delivery. In doing that it is very clear that there are a lot of different measures, a lot of different statistics and a lot of numbers that when put all together can sometimes just look a bit overwhelming, and you are not quite sure how everything fits together.

I think one of the things that, when I first saw Ms Carrick's motion, I really did appreciate is that what Ms Carrick is asking for here is actually accessible information and clarity around everything that is already available. A lot of the things that Ms Carrick is asking for in various places will be publicly available, but putting it all together into a coherent whole I think is the part that we really came to understand is what Ms Carrick was after. Working through that, we have actually been able to come up with something that I hope will be quite positive in informing the ongoing debate, seeing as we seem to be having it quite regularly in this Assembly, and putting that information there so that we can have that informed debate across the chamber.

I think, picking up on some of the comments that have been made—this goes a little bit to the point Ms Carrick was making around the plan—the plan that is referenced by Ms Carrick in the housing report card is the pipeline that the government has in place

for delivering the homes. It was put forward in the most recent budget, and that pipeline goes to the 13,200 target and how we are tracking towards it. It is a progressive realisation, and it is done through a range of programs: acquisitions off the private market, renewal of existing properties and new dwellings delivered through a whole range of programs. Again, in the conversations with Ms Carrick, I am more than happy to start to look at how we can bring that together in a form that is far easier for people to take in.

The other part there that Ms Carrick is asking for in the plan and that other members have also raised is the gap. The amendment that I have moved provides a little bit more information to inform this debate just around what that gap is. It is a circa 400 gap to reach the 13,200, and that is reflective of what has been delivered to date, because we actually have delivered quite a number of homes, and what is already in the pipeline currently being progressed and is planned, funded and underway. The 400 gap—even though it was my first day in the job at the estimates, even I remember this one. The government has acknowledged that there are 400 properties we will need to identify and we will need to fund.

I think I would just like to clarify again some of the comments that have been made. Not providing detailed information on how those will be delivered is not the government withholding or trying to be tricky. It is in recognition that, particularly in the out years of the program, there is a huge amount of uncertainty and variance, and making decisions now means that we might actually miss out on opportunities in the future. That is part of the reason for developing the pipeline approach in that we know where we need to get to, we have different avenues that are there but we are not set into a course of action that does not allow us to adapt or take opportunities as they come up, but we can realise opportunities across all the available levers.

In talking through with Ms Carrick how we would approach this—because my main concern, given the variability and given the uncertainty that we would be working with through the indicative forecasting, was giving an impression that somehow this was a definitive plan and that that was going to be the only thing and it would not vary or change. I think it is fair to say from the outset that whatever we do put in the indicative part will definitely change. I will just preface that now so that when I get all the questions saying, "Why is what we're looking at different to what was in the indicative plan?" I can point everyone back to this debate where I said I was very upfront about what this was going to do.

The other part I think I would just like to take a moment to pick up on are some of the statistics and looking at those headline indicators. Particularly with the headline indicators—this is something I have really come to appreciate since holding the portfolio—those headline indicators do not show what is going on below them, and there is a lot of activity. There are a lot of people coming on to waiting lists. There are a lot of people coming off waiting lists. There are a lot of properties that were vacant becoming not vacant, being occupied and vice versa. As you would expect when you are managing a property portfolio of 12,000 homes, the turnover is significant. While we might not necessarily see the headline indicator change, the 588 that we have spoken about of vacant properties most recently might be 588 the next month, but they are likely to be very different properties forming each number. That goes again for the waitlist too. There is just a certain level when you get to a portfolio holding of such a

size that there will just be a turnover rate that means that there are a number of properties vacant because people will be moving in and out, so we will always see that. That should not be taken as the same properties are just sitting still, being unaddressed.

In the second part of the motion where it is calling on a plan for the vacant properties, again, I give assurances to everyone that there are processes in place—Housing ACT does follow those—to work through as efficiently as possible the allocation of properties once they are handed in for re-tenanting. Again, I am happy to put that out in a format that members can use to inform debate and be clear on.

I think I would just like to pick up on a couple of comments that Ms Barry made. This goes to an ongoing discussion about how it is hard to let properties. Again, I would just like to put on the record, even though I did in previous debates, that the government does not classify hard-to-let properties based on any assessment of their status or their condition. The hard-to-let properties are because we have offered them to people and people have not chosen to take them, so they do become harder to let for that simple reason of they are not being accepted. That can be for a range of reasons. It is not solely, I think, for some of the reasons that have been forward in debates.

I would just also ask members when talking about hard-to-let properties that we do it in such a way that does not make people living in places that are their home feel that there is a stigma or a shame attached to that property. While some people might not find a place appealing or meeting their needs, we do have a range of tenants who will live in places that might not rent as quickly as others who do actually really love their home and love the community that they are in. I think we just need to be respectful of all the opinions and circumstances.

The other thing I would pick up on is if anybody is on the waitlist and they have a change in their circumstances, please do reach out to Housing ACT and update the application. If your circumstances have updated, that can be reconsidered. Based on the correspondence I have received from a number of people that would go to this matter, I do not think it is as well known as it could be as an avenue for making considerations to your application. Again, if you have made an application, you are on the waiting list and your circumstances changes, particularly if they do become more pressing, certainly I would encourage to then come to Housing ACT and update those details.

I think that has probably covered all of my comments I had to respond to and what people have raised. Again I would like to just thank Ms Carrick for bringing this, because it really does go to that point of having an informed discussion. Pulling together information in such a way that is clear to everyone and helps them in their understanding and their scrutiny I do not think is a bad thing. I was happy to support Ms Carrick and thank her for the collegiate way that she has engaged to make sure we get something that is possible to deliver and usable.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (5.13): I would like to thank Ms Barry, Mr Emerson, Ms Vassarotti and their offices for working with my office to achieve this outcome. As mentioned, housing affordability is an incredibly important issue. We cannot slip on this target of providing homes to people in need in our community. In fact, with the cost-of-living crisis, we need more public housing, as mentioned by everyone. This motion will help us track the delivery of the homes that are committed to. We will look

to advocate for more. I would like to thank Minister Orr and her office for working with my office to reach a consensus in the Assembly to get more visibility over the delivery of this very important infrastructure.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Papers

Motion to take note of papers

MR 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.

Richardson shops

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (5.14): I wanted to thank Minister Steel for giving a formal update in response to my motion on the Richardson shops and inquiries yesterday during tabled papers. It is helpful to understand that the government considered future updates from the point of time that Richardson shops secured a tenant. I understand the minister provided this information in answer to a question on notice; although, in the last formal update to my motion and the according Assembly resolution the site had not yet secured a tenant. It is great to get that confirmation on the record today.

I am also glad to get an update on the review of our planning legislation to ensure we are doing everything we can to stop the epidemic of vacant blocks in the ACT. I was able swing past Richo shops earlier this year—a few times actually; I promise it is not weird. I heard that there was a mysterious fence around the shops. Indeed since then we have seen a fence and colourful signage, saying that we will be seeing a laundromat, a cafe and a takeaway coming, ideally, by the end of the year. From what I have been hearing, the community are very excited to see this progress after seven years.

The minister also links to the ACT government submission to the controlled activity orders inquiry and that is has welcomed that process. From what we can find on record, I understand that Access Canberra has not utilised the controlled activity order process towards Richardson shops, but they have issued a show cause notice. The shops are considered an active regulatory matter.

I am still wondering if the orders are only actioned when community members put in a complaint. To that end, I am looking forward to the recommendations from the controlled activity orders inquiry.

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) (5.16): I too rise to speak on the paper tabled by the Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development about Richardson shops. I really do welcome this update from the minister this week, just like Miss Nuttall does.

It is very, very, exciting for the Richardson community that Richardson shops are on track to reopen by the end of this year, with a laundromat, a cafe and possibly a takeaway on the site. This has been a really, really long time coming, and it is just so exciting. I have been advocating to revitalise Richardson shops for more than two years now. To see the work that has been going on at the site for the last couple months and confirmation that Access Canberra inspected the site just last month and confirmed that the works going on do include the installation of a laundromat and cafe really confirms that this building community pressure has led to the owner of the shops revitalising them. Something will be there by the end of the year for the community to enjoy.

I wanted to thank everyone in the community who has really advocated and supported this push to get the shops up and running, who supported my petition in 2024, who supported an earlier petition by former Brindabella MLA Nicole Lawder, who continued to advocate with me and Miss Nuttall for the future of Richardson shops.

I too, like Miss Nuttall, stop by the shops on a semi-regular basis. I have even been met by constituents while standing there staring in the fence just to have a chat about what is going on. I often do some very slow drive-bys along Clift Crescent just to see if anything has changed. I am sure it does not look too suspicious at all. It is such welcome news. I cannot wait to visit the revitalised shops later this year to get a coffee, maybe put in some laundry. Thank you to the minister for the update. I really look forward to seeing them open.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Supplementary answer to a question without notice
Government procurement—conduct in procurement

MR BARR (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Minister for Trade, Investment and the Knowledge Economy, Minister for Tourism and Events, and Minister for Major Projects) (5.18): In question time this afternoon Mrs Morris asked me a question around major capital procurements. It was a second supplementary. In my answer I neglected to use the plural. I have just seen the *Hansard*, and I mentioned that the threshold for a definition of major in the initial "round" singular was anything over $500,000. That should have been in the initial "rounds" plural, as we have subsequently announced in the government response of last week that we would be extending to all projects over $500,000. In looking at the *Hansard*, it is incorrect. It should be "rounds" plural—what I announced earlier and then what was in the government response last week.

Competition Legislation Amendment Bill 2026

Debate resumed from 16 September 2026, on motion by **Mr Steel**:

> That this bill be agreed to in principle.

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (5.20): I rise today to speak on the Competition Legislation Amendment Bill 2026 on behalf of the Canberra Liberals. The Canberra Liberals do support this bill in principle. It is on its face a fairly simple piece of legislation. It updates the Competition Policy Reform Act 1996 and the Independent Competition and Regulatory Commission Act 1997 so that the ACT's legislation

reflects the revitalised national competition policy framework agreed by all jurisdictions in November 2024.

The national agreement has a clear set of objectives: more choice, higher quality and lower prices for consumers, more opportunities for new entrants, more dynamic and productive markets and a more level playing field between governments and private businesses. Those are objectives we support. Fundamentally, these are Liberal principles. They also are objectives that the ACT desperately needs to take more seriously.

Competition is not some abstract economic concept. It is about whether a small business can enter a market without being buried in red tape, whether a new operator can challenge an incumbent, whether consumers have genuine choice and whether businesses have incentives to innovate, improve and keep prices down for consumers. It is about whether the government itself is willing to accept that it should not always be the biggest player or the most protected player or the player writing the rules in its own favour. That is why the principles behind this national framework are important.

The agreement says government should harness the benefits of competition, support consumers to benefit from competition, ensure government and private business compete on a level playing field, promote a single national market and make government pricing efficient and transparent. The Canberra Liberals support this national agreement and the subsequent amendments the government has brought, but the real test will be whether the government acts on the principles or if they treat them as empty words to updating legislation. The bill by itself is not competition reform; it is the legislative housekeeping required to align the ACT with the new national agreement.

Clauses 4 to 7 update references in the Competition Policy Reform Act so that the legislation points to the new intergovernmental agreement rather than the superseded conduct code agreement. Clauses 8 to 10 update the competitive neutrality complaints investigation framework. Clauses 11 to 13 move the arbitration provisions into the body of the legislation and remove obsolete clauses. Clauses 14 to 17 update dictionary definitions, including "competitive neutrality" and "access regimes", so they match the new national framework.

The national framework requires the appropriate processes and frameworks to be in place by 31 December this year, so there is a clear reason for this legislation to proceed now. Over this deadline it also provides a very short timeframe to get the policies implemented that would bring the agreement into effect. Supporting this legislation is the easy bit. The harder bit is actually delivering the reform that sits behind it, and that is where I want to focus, because the national agreement talks about lower prices, greater consumer choice, easier market entry and stronger productivity. Those things are not going to automatically happen just because a definition is updated in an act. There are policy decisions that need to be enacted. The government must remove barriers. They must repeal regulations that do not serve a necessary and useful purpose. Those objectives will be achieved when licensing systems are simple, when approvals are faster, when procurement is genuinely competitive and when businesses are not forced to spend more time complying with government processes than serving their customers.

That is where the government has real work to do, because for years Canberra businesses have been telling us the same thing: the cost of doing business in the ACT is out of control. The cumulative burden of regulation, taxes, charges, compliance, licensing, approvals, procurement requirements, portable long service leave—these are just a few of the factors that make business in the ACT less and less viable. Any one requirement might look manageable when you look at it in isolation, but business does not experience government in terms of one regulation at a time; they experience all of it at once, and it can feel like a tsunami. A small business owner does not have some separate desk for payroll tax, another for work health and safety, another for licensing, another for planning, another for procurement and another for industrial relations. For a small business, it is pretty much the same person doing all of it, generally after the shop closes and generally without a cent of benefit coming from it.

Competition policy has to be practical. If we want to see more entrants into the market, we need to make it easier to enter. That is how you build a dynamic economy. If we want lower prices, we need to look seriously at the costs that government itself imposes on business. If we want greater productivity, we have to have the government stop designing systems where the first response to every problem is another form, another approval or another layer of regulation. That is why I know Mr Parton has talked about unleashing Canberra small businesses.

One of the more important parts of this national framework is competitive neutrality. The principle is pretty straight forward: government, government business and private business should compete on a level playing field. Government should never use its position as a regulator, owner and purchaser to tilt the field in its own favour. A private business should not be disadvantaged simply because it is competing against an entity that has the backing and the power of government. The bill updates the ACT's competitive neutrality framework and includes public interest exemptions consistent with the new agreement. Public interest exemptions can be legitimate. I accept there will be circumstances where a strict competition outcome is not the only consideration, but those exemptions have to be transparent and properly justified. The national agreement itself requires transparency and provides that restrictions on competition should only be permissible where the public interest test is met. That is fundamental.

The ACT also has a productivity challenge. The right competition settings drive businesses to improve. They encourage investment, reward innovation and provide consumers alternatives. It creates pressure to deliver better services at better prices. Getting the context right serves everyone well and drives the power of innovation towards the things that the people in our community want and need. A government that claims to want productivity, though, cannot be indifferent to competition, nor can it claim to support competition while continuing to make Canberra an unnecessarily difficult place to do business. The world is changing fast, so are the markets. The government should make sure regulation enables competition rather than freezing old models in place. It should support emerging sectors rather than inherently treating change is the enemy. New technology should not be forced to fit into old rules designed decades ago, and innovation should not depend on whether a business has the resources to navigate a complicated regulatory system. We need to have systems in this territory that are just as dynamic as the new technologies which we are seeking to deal with.

This is where Liberal principles are so relevant, because it is the Liberal Party that believes in competition, choice and merit. We believe government should set fair rules, enforce them properly and consistently and then give people the space to innovate. When government intervention is absolutely necessary, it must be proportionate and justified. Those principles sit comfortably within objectives of this national framework, but they also give us a benchmark against which to judge the government's implementation. The government should not come back next year pointing to the passage of this bill as evidence that competition reform is complete or has somehow been achieved. This legislative change is the smallest part of the puzzle. The reform that actually comes next is where the real opportunity is for change.

This is the government's opportunity to identify where ACT regulation unnecessarily restricts competition and where there are barriers to entry, to ask whether government procurement encourages genuine competition, to make sure public monopolies are properly scrutinised and to ensure fees and charges do not become barriers in themselves. It must not be another excuse to avoid those hard jobs. The national agreement requires that every time the government regulates they ask whether the same public purpose could be achieved in a simpler and less restrictive way.

Beyond competition and business viability, the implementation of this agreement presents the opportunity to relieve some of the cost-of-living pressures that Canberrans are experiencing. Competition is one of the best long-term disciplines on prices. This is not a magic answer to every cost increase, but where consumers have more providers competing for their business, businesses have stronger incentives to offer value. That is what I mean by getting the context right. Where barriers protect incumbents and make market entry difficult, consumers pay the price.

The Canberra Liberals will support this bill, and we support aligning ACT legislation with the new national competition policy framework. Our support does come with a pretty clear expectation: the government needs to embrace and must embrace the spirit of the agreement, not just the words that have been transferred into this legislation. That means practical reform. The Canberra Liberals expect to see the reduction of unnecessary regulatory costs. We should start to see that it becomes easier for new businesses to enter markets and that the playing field between businesses and the government becomes levelled.

The national agreement presents a real opportunity for the government to have a look in the mirror, recognise the role it has played in restricting competition and choose a different path. The Canberra Liberals support this bill, and we will be watching closely to make sure the government follows through with the practical completion and reform that Canberra needs, because it is not words on a page that matter, it is the outcomes achieved for our community. I commend the bill to the Assembly.

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (5.34): I want to thank the Treasurer for bringing forward this bill and for the briefing and Mr Cocks for his contributions. The Greens will be supporting this bill. It updates the territory's framework to align with the revitalised national competition policy, and it is a really worthwhile piece of legislative housekeeping. There are a lot of pressures in this area, and we are actively involved and looking forward to what more reforms are required. This is a good and worthwhile bill, and we are pleased to support it.

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage, and Minister for Sport and Recreation) (5.34), in reply: I thank members for their contributions to the debate on this bill. The bill is an important step towards implementing the revitalised national competition policy framework agreed by all Australian governments in 2024. I think the passage of this bill today may mean that we are the first state or territory to actually implement the requirements of that through legislation. It complements the work that has been occurring within government to implement the national competition policy principles in decision-making processes by updating the laws to also reflect those principles.

The amendments authorise the Independent Competition and Regulatory Commission to apply the new approaches for competitive neutrality and public interest exemptions when considering complaints that the government has not applied the principles. Further, they update third-party access arrangements to reflect the new framework. Viewed as a whole, they deliver the territory's commitments under the Intergovernmental Agreement on National Competition Policy and supports nationally consistent competition policy settings.

While the amendments themselves are relatively modest, the principles that they support are significant. Competition policy can sometimes sound technical or abstract, but its real-world purpose is straightforward. Strong and effective competition helps deliver better outcomes for consumers, businesses and the broader community. It encourages innovation and productivity, supports investment and creates incentives for organisations to improve the quality, efficiency and value of the goods and services that they provide.

This bill updates the Competition Policy Reform Act 1996 and the Independent Competition and Regulatory Commission Act 1997 so that they reflect the current national framework rather than the arrangements that have now been superseded. It is good legislative housekeeping, but it also ensures that the ACT's competition legislation remains contemporary and fit for purpose.

Implementation of the revised national competition policy framework is already underway across the territory. Recently ACT government agencies participated in workshops designed to embed competition into better policymaking, helping agencies to design proportionate regulation and ensure government businesses compete fairly. I note that we are doing work to understand the impacts on competition in business through the introduction of the competition impact assessment guideline and refreshing our approach to competitive neutrality as part of this process.

The bill also supports the ACT's eligibility for commonwealth national competition policy productivity payments of up to $5 million. However, the real value of these reforms extends beyond the access to productivity payments. It lies in creating conditions that support stronger productivity, more competitive markets and better outcomes for Canberrans over the long term. This bill delivers on the ACT's commitments under the intergovernmental agreement, modernises territory legislation and ensures that our competition framework remains consistent with nationally agreed settings. I commend it to the Assembly.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Bill agreed to in principle.

Leave granted to dispense with the detail stage.

Bill agreed to.

Economics, Industry and Recreation—Standing Committee
Statement by chair

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS (Brindabella) (5.38): Pursuant to standing order 246A I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Economics, Industry and Recreation relating to our inquiry into gambling amendment bills.

On 16 September 2026, the committee was referred the Gambling and Racing Control (Gambling Exclusion) Amendment Bill 2026. We decided to inquire into the bill on 30 September. On 20 October, the committee was referred the Gaming Machine (Harm Prevention and Reduction) Amendment Bill 2026, and we decided to inquire into this bill also, on 22 October.

I wish to inform the Assembly that given both bills together propose changes to the gambling harm reduction policy of the government, including changes to the Gambling and Racing Control (Code of Practice) Regulation 2002, the committee has decided to inquire into both bills simultaneously as part of a single inquiry. I therefore have moved a motion to extend the reporting date of the Gambling and Racing Control (Gambling Exclusion) Amendment Bill 2026 from 15 December 2026 to 19 January 2027 to align with the due date for the Gaming Machine (Harm Prevention and Reduction) Amendment Bill 2026.

The committee has also renamed the inquiry to the inquiry into gambling amendment bills. The closing date for submissions is 22 November, and we welcome commentary on one or both bills.

Statements by members
World Stroke Day

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (5.39): Today is World Stroke Day. I would love to take a moment of your time to raise awareness of a condition that can affect anyone at any age. Stroke remains one of Australia's leading causes of death and disability. Here in Canberra, more than 2,500 people are living with the effects of stroke, and around one in five stroke survivors are under the age of 65. This is a reminder that stroke is not just something that happens to older Australians.

The most important message today—I will leave you with this—is the acronym FAST to help you identify the signs of stroke and to act fast. F stands for face. Has one side of the person's face dropped? A stands for arms. Can the person lift both arms? S stands for speech. Is their speech slurred or difficult to understand? T stands for time. If you notice any of these, call 000 immediately. When it comes to stroke, every minute matters. The faster a person receives treatment, the greater their chance of survival and

recovery, and it lowers their risk of long-term disability. World Stroke Day is also an opportunity to focus on prevention: managing blood pressure, staying active, not smoking—healthy lifestyle.

Breast Cancer Awareness Month

MS TOUGH (Brindabella—Minister for Human Rights, Minister for Community Services, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Women, Seniors and Veterans, and Minister for the Prevention of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence) (5.41): I rise to mark October as Breast Cancer Awareness Month. Fifty-six people in Australia are diagnosed with breast cancer every single day, which is over 20,000 a year. While the vast majority of cases are women, men are not immune, with one in seven women and one in 612 men diagnosed each year. Many of us know someone who has had breast cancer or have cared for someone with breast cancer. The five-year survival rate is 93 per cent, up from 75 per cent in 1991, which is incredible, but more can be done, with early detection being one of the main keys that that we can increase that survival rate.

If you find a lump or something is different about your breasts, see a doctor and get a breast check. For women over 40, BreastScreen is available, with women aged between 50 and 74 recommended to go to BreastScreen for a mammogram every two years. For women under 40 and men, see a doctor—like I recently did—when you find a lump. Mammograms are not great for women under 40, but see a doctor, get a breast check, tell your friends, tell your family. We can really increase the five-year survival rate, and we can make a difference for the community for breast cancer.

Discussion concluded.

Adjournment

Motion (by **Ms Stephen-Smith**) proposed:

> That the Assembly do now adjourn.

Youth—Raise Our Voice in Parliament

MS BARRY (Ginninderra) (5.43): I rise this evening to deliver a speech written by a special constituent, who is in the chamber today. This speech was written by Santhe, who is 12 years old, who submitted this speech as part of the shortlist for excellent speeches prepared by students in Canberra as part of the Raise Your Voice initiative. I just want to thank Santhe and her mum for such wise words for such a young person. It gives me hope for the future when I meet special people like you, so thank you. The speech goes as follows:

> No-one likes to be sad, but we all have to be from time to time. So when we are, it is important to know where to look for help. There, parliament having a positive mental health and wellbeing is a really important thing to live a happy life. But sometimes when people start to struggle, they don't know what to do to make their sadness go away.
>
> Although there are mental health services in most places in Australia, some places

> do not have them, mostly in rural and remote areas; or they do have them (mental health services) but they aren't easy to access. This is a problem, as people won't get the help they need quickly enough or may not get it at all. Did you know that people in rural and remote areas only access mental health services one-fifth as much as people in metropolitan places? Rural areas often are less privileged because they are less popular and well known, but they should still be treated like other places, with good wellbeing services and more.
>
> You only have one life, and everyone wants to enjoy it. And don't you want to help Australians live their best lives? Having a negative mental health and wellbeing doesn't just make you sad, it can lead to illness that ends up affecting a whole bunch of people. Although there are options to call people for help, speaking over the phone does not have the same effect as talking in person.
>
> Everyone wants to be happy, and it is nice to see others being happy too. So I strongly encourage you to take action to ensure that every town and city in Australia has effective and easily accessible mental health services so you can brighten up hundreds of people's days.

That was a speech from Santhe, who is only 12 years old. Again, thank you, Santhe, for those very wise words. This speech spoke to me because oftentimes we do not realise how affected the young people around us are by the things that they see and hear and our society in general. It is really good for us to listen to young people around us but, importantly, also to acknowledge that they are affected by the decisions that we make all across our lives. Thank you very much and thank you for this beautiful speech.

Youth—community partnership funding program proposal

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS (Brindabella) (5.46): I am going to share an email this afternoon which came to me from a young man called Thane. It is as good as a speech. It is not part of the Raise Our Voice program, but it is certainly in the vibe of young people who are engaged in our society thinking about what can be improved and making suggestions.

Before I begin, I will just provide a little bit of context about Thane, who joins us looking very, very smart in the red tie in the chairs up the back. He joins us in the Assembly tonight. I first became aware of Thane's talents when I watched him in the Caroline Chisholm school musical in 2024, where he was the lead opposite the daughter of one of my friends from Stromlo High School. Thane at the time was in year 10. My son was in year 9. His sister Mia, who is also a very, very engaged and thoughtful student, was in year 8. My other son was in year 7. Thane has moved on. He is about to graduate, because time travels like that, from Lake Tuggeranong College, which I totally respect as his choice of an educational outlet.

Beyond that, he is developing into the sort of young person that any electorate would be extremely glad and grateful to have. He is a key part of the Tuggeranong Community Council. He is engaged. He is dynamic. He is provocative. He gets sometimes some very interesting questions from members of the council, and he defends his position and is extremely relaxed in how he answers questions. I am very jealous about how he does that. As this email is about to show, it is not just in the community council; he came to the Youth Parliament earlier this year. He does the thinking. I will share the email:

> The proposal was something along the lines of a **Community Partnership Funding Program**. Rather than investing solely in new infrastructure, the program would provide flexible funding to existing community spaces and organisations across North, South and Central Canberra.
>
> Eligible applicants such as local businesses, sporting clubs, welfare agencies and community organisations could apply annually for funding to deliver youth-focused initiatives for people aged 13-25.
>
> Examples of eligible initiatives might include:
>
> - Local businesses hosting free youth recreation nights or partnering with schools.
> - Community centres offering mentoring programs, cooking classes and digital literacy workshops.
> - Sporting clubs providing free or beginner training sessions.
> - Arts organisations running free screenings, creative workshops and youth showcases.
>
> One of the greatest strengths of this model is that it builds on infrastructure and organisations that already exist. It supports local groups, encourages community-led solutions and avoids the significant costs associated with constructing new facilities. Because young people are often already familiar with these spaces, they may also be more likely to engage with the programs offered.
>
> As part of the application process, organisations could be asked to outline:
>
> - the services they intend to provide;
> - the young people they aim to support;
> - how they will engage participants;
> - how outcomes will be measured; and
> - referral pathways for young people requiring additional support.
>
> Demographic data could also be used to ensure funding is distributed fairly or directed towards communities with the greatest need.
>
> I believe this approach could be particularly valuable in Tuggeranong. Over the years, I've seen a number of community spaces and businesses come and go. It's wonderful when new facilities or social venues open, but without ongoing support particularly in the current economy they can struggle to survive.
>
> A recent example is the closure of the Tuggeranong bowling alley. While I understand its closure was due to licensing issues rather than financial ones, it still represents a significant loss for the area's social life. It highlights how important it is to support the places that bring communities together, not just create new ones.
>
> I was wondering whether a program like this already exists. If it does, that would be fantastic, and perhaps the focus should instead be on making young people and community organisations more aware of it. If not, I think it could be a worthwhile concept to explore.

That was Thane. I am pleased to say that Minister Pettersson got back to Thane, and there is a live concept like this that the minister is exploring, but he was extremely

grateful for Thane's thoughts. Keep making them and please keep sending them in, young man, and all the best.

Youth—Artificial intelligence proposed limits

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (5.51): I have a speech here from Caspian Beeching, who is a year 10 student from UC High School Kaleen, who was a work experience student in my office last month. The title of his speech—this will get your attention—is "Should AI be allowed to operate deadly weapons?" He wrote:

> AI in warfare is becoming an increasingly important topic raising ethical and moral questions. The US's recent war in Iran and Israels war in Gaza is the first time ever we've seen widespread use of Lethal Autonomous Weapon Systems (LAWS). AI can often offer precision and efficiency this can understandably raise concerns for whether or not this is ethical, legal or safe.
>
> The most common use of LAWS is in autonomous drones and targeting systems where AI is used to in target recognition and selection. I believe that we cannot put AI in such important positions until we believe they can be completely trusted to make decisions around morality with the same or higher level of human conscience. AI should not be used to create more death and suffering in already terrible war. It is an incredibly useful tool
>
> If we were to allow AI to kill it would raise question on who has responsibility for the decisions it makes. If it was to commit a war crime by for example killing an innocent civilian, then who should be held accountable for it. As inhumane as warfare already is AI has the ability to completely dehumanize it.
>
> The US maintains the stance that humans remain in control and that they are the ones that must make the final decision to pull the trigger. However, it is not clear how time a human will spend on deciding whether or not to pull the trigger. If we do allow AI to control weapons and decide when to kill how do, we know that they will do it with good intention and not turn those weapons back on us.
>
> AI can be an incredibly useful tool in day-to-day life however that does not mean it should be put in control of something as important as human life. It is such new technology, and we lack the knowledge about how it thinks and how to properly control it. One day it could even get to the level where it is better at making those decisions then humans. Until then I strongly believe that it is completely immoral to put human lives into non-human hands.

This is a very thought-provoking piece from Caspian Beeching, a year 10 student from UC High School Kaleen, who was in my office for a week last month on work experience.

Pegasus ACT—50 for 50 – Movement is medicine

MS BERRY (Ginninderra) (5.54): Next week marks the start of Pegasus Riding for the Disabled's 50 for 50 fundraiser, where over the month of November volunteers, including me, have signed up to move 50 kilometres to raise $250,000. I have the honour of being an ambassador for Pegasus 50 for 50 and strongly believe that Pegasus deserves all of the recognition we can raise for being an absolute pillar of the community and the wider ACT region. My own relationship with Pegasus goes back to

when I was a teenager volunteering as a student at Ginninderra high school, now Kingsford Smith, and I cannot speak highly enough of the importance of this program.

For over 50 years now Pegasus has been helping children and young adults with disabilities experience the incredible benefits of equine therapy. The simple movement of a horse can improve physical strength, coordination and balance, but it is the smiles on young people's faces as their confidence grows and the tears of joy on parents' and families' faces that tell the real story. This is where lifelong memories are made.

The impact extends far beyond the arena, helping individuals achieve goals that they might never have thought possible. I have seen this firsthand. I have met with many of the young people and their families, and it is truly moving to see the difference this program makes to them all. It is why I am so passionate about helping them to achieve their goals and continue their important work for another 50 years and then some.

What makes Pegasus so special is that every success story is made possible by a community that believes in real inclusion, opportunity and potential for every individual. I want to give a special shout-out to Daniel Bartholomaeus, former participant and 2025 ACT Young Australian of the Year, among many other achievements, as well as Pegasus ambassador. Daniel is a remarkable young person and advocate for Pegasus. For him, it is personal. He credits Pegasus with the person that he is today. Let me tell you, he is quite the most extraordinary human.

I also recognise the whole Pegasus team, the over 150 volunteers who do everything from horse care to grounds maintenance, gardening and cleaning—pretty much anything that is needed—as well as the coaches, side walkers and horse leaders.

I would also like to take the chance today to highlight and congratulate senior coach John Riley, who has been nominated to represent the ACT for the 2027 Australian of the Year Awards—and of course to each of the horse heroes, Lachie, Derby, Flicker, Blaze, Blossom, Houdini, and horses in training, Wags, Polly and Braveheart. It is because of every single Pegasus horse and human that the 50 for 50 fundraiser is about more than raising money. It is about ensuring that future generations can access the same life-changing experiences and support the whole Pegasus family, as provided for the past five decades.

I encourage everyone who can to get involved by donating, taking part in the challenge or simply helping by spreading the word. Every kilometre that is moved, every dollar that is raised, every conversation about Pegasus helps strengthen the future of this remarkable organisation. As Pegasus celebrates its 50th anniversary, it is a chance for all of us to reflect on the thousands of lives that have been touched by its work and to help ensure that its impact continues for many years to come.

Standing orders—suspension

Motion (by **Ms Tough)** 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 an extra 30 minutes.

Brindabella Electorate—Australian of the Year Nominees

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) (5.58): I wanted to take a moment to recognise the incredible residents of Brindabella who have been nominated for ACT Australian of the Year Awards this year. Across the four categories, five nominees are from Brindabella, which is pretty exciting.

Nominated for ACT Australian of the Year is Martin Hodgson, a human rights advocate. He has spent more than 20 years advocating for human rights, representing over 500 clients pro bono across more than 30 countries, which is absolutely incredible work, and he is someone we should all be super, super proud of. I am really excited to see him recognised.

For Senior Australian of the Year, Christine Warren, the founder of Sassy Seniors, has been nominated. Personally, I love seeing Christine's weekly Facebook posts in the Canberra Notice Board, with updates of what the Sassy Seniors have been up to this week. It is just incredible to see that what started as a Facebook post from Christine looking for people to join her for a coffee has grown into this absolutely incredible, large and supportive community that gets together weekly and has more than just coffee now. It is this big group. I am really proud of Christine and really happy to see her recognised.

For Young Australian of the Year, Laura Prince, a child poverty prevention advocate, has been nominated. Laura is an ambassador for the Smith Family Learning for Life program and has taken her own experience of growing up with financial pressures and being a young carer of two siblings with disability, not just giving back to the community but becoming an absolute leader and advocate for the community and for thousands of disadvantaged children across Australia. I really commend her for that work, being so young and achieving so much.

For Australia's Local Hero, Brindabella has two nominees, and I have a personal connection with both: Dr Sarah Bombell and Nate Swift. Dr Bombell is an obstetrician and lactation consultant. Thanks to Dr Bombell and her colleagues, I personally benefited from their support five years ago when I had a newborn. I am so grateful for her work and her team's work for turning what was routine, regular mastitis into the ability to feed my child. It is just so great to see her recognised. The Mother Hub, which she set up a few years ago, has been named as one of only three Australian community-based health agencies to receive the international board certified lactation consultant Care Award, which is no small feat.

The second nominee for Brindabella is Nate Swift, the owner of Little Luxton cafe, which I think most people in the Assembly, if not Canberra, now are aware of. Little Luxton is attached to the Gordon Community Centre, where $1 from every coffee sold goes back into local programs. Nate had never run a cafe when he opened it but wanted to do something to give back to the community. I think everyone has seen Little Luxton go from strength to strength. Little Luxton partners with local schools and young people to provide work experience and one-off introductory barista courses. This has been changing the lives of young people in the Lanyon Valley and around.

Congratulations to all the nominees, particularly from Brindabella, from across all of the ACT. I wish everyone luck at the awards in a few weeks' time.

Economy—wealth distribution

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (6.02): There is a question at the heart of every economy, and we do not ask it often enough. When a community works hard, creates value and builds prosperity, who is getting to share in that? Specifically, who is benefiting when our government signs a contract or when public land changes hands? Who is benefiting when our taxes are financing the infrastructure that we are all relying on? There is a really strong growing feeling, I think, that the benefits are not flowing evenly throughout our community. This is becoming quite obvious to a lot of people. This is happening here in the ACT, but this is happening Australia-wide and globally. There is a really strong feeling that people would like to take back some of this prosperity and put it back into the public domain.

Community wealth building is one of the answers to turning back this tide. We have got some really great advantages here in in Canberra to move towards a community wealth-building platform. We have got an amazing city here. We are a city full of students, carers, workers, researchers, tradespeople, innovators, artists and public servants. We have got really strong institutions, and we have a community that really cares deeply about fairness, but we have not actually managed to turn all of those benefits into sharing that community wealth around evenly.

We have also got an economy that is really strongly dominated by public spending. That is enormous here in the ACT in terms of buying goods and services, employing people, managing our land and investing our assets, and that is an enormous benefit. Because we have so much control we can actually influence those decisions and make sure that they are spreading the wealth around in our community and keeping a lot of that wealth here in our community. It means that every contract can be more than a transaction and every choice about land can be about how we are keeping the land and the benefits here within our community.

I recently released a paper about this community wealth building in August. We went through some of the ACT government procurement data, which has been showing a pretty strong trend. We used to have half of our procurement going to local suppliers. That has fallen down to a third since 2021. There is quite a lot going on in the procurement space at the moment. We have got a lot of tension, I think, at the moment about how we are using our land and how we are allowing the private sector to use our land and what rights the public has to facilities that they consider to be public goods. Community wealth building is a really great framework to bring all of that together. It asks government to look beyond short-term decisions and immediate transactions and consider those long-term returns to the immediate community, to the Canberra community.

It has five practical pillars in it: fair and secure employment; procurement that gives us capable local community enterprises and a capable economy; making sure that our public land and assets are being managed for enduring public benefit; wider ownership through cooperatives and social enterprises; and finances that support productive local

investment. The good news is that this is not something we have to imagine. This is something that a lot of other places are doing. Scotland recently enacted community wealth-building legislation. They passed that this year. That has established responsibilities for government leadership in local planning and procurement. Cleveland has explored worker-owned cooperatives connected to major local institutions. Preston in England has been working with anchor institutions to strengthen regional supply chains.

There are a lot of strands that we have actually on the ground here in Canberra. I am really excited to open up this concept and see which bits we can introduce here in the ACT. I am hosting a round table next week where we have got a lot of locals and a lot of experts who have been working on community wealth building to see where our gaps are here in the ACT and where some of our best opportunities are.

I think there is a lot of concern and a lot of growing discontent at the moment that wealth and prosperity are not being shared around and that we have major problems that we need to grapple with. We have growing inequality, we have growing housing inequality, we have growing challenges from climate change. Community wealth building and restructuring our economy to make sure that we are looking after everybody equally is a really, really great opportunity that we have.

Children's Week

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Education, Minister for Child Development and Wellbeing, Minister for Finance, Minister for the Public Service, and Minister for Health Infrastructure) (6.07), in reply: It is with great pleasure that I rise to talk about Children's Week, which is this week. Children's Week is an opportunity to celebrate children and the importance of childhood. The evidence is clear: what happens in childhood shapes who you are and who you become. Children's Week also reminds us of the importance of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. These rights include the right for all children from birth to 18 years of age to be safe, to learn, to play, to express views and to participate in decisions that affect them.

This year the Children's Week theme is based on UNCRC Article 30: children have the right to use their own language, celebrate their culture and practise their religion. Every child should feel that they belong, that their culture is valued and that their voice matters. We know that when children feel safe and supported they are more likely to succeed at school, build positive relationships and contribute to their communities.

That is exactly the message delivered by 10-year-old Aurore from Hughes Primary School, whose poster won the 2026 national Children's Week Council of Australia poster competition. Aurore's design effectively highlights the 2026 theme and depicts Australian children from different cultures, with different abilities and speaking diverse languages. Excellent work, Aurore.

I also want to congratulate everyone who was recognised at yesterday's 2026 ACT Children's Week Awards. The awards celebrate people and organisations making a difference in children's lives, as well as young people who inspire others. This afternoon I specifically acknowledge some recipients from our ACT public school

community.

Jeremy from Canberra High School was recognised for his dedication to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, helping them build confidence, strengthen their cultural identity and succeed in their learning. Among other things, Jeremy coordinated the school's first NAIDOC carnival, bringing students, families and staff together to celebrate First Nations cultures.

Jill is a member of the Turner School P & C. Her volunteering helps enrich school lunches, while her playground clean-ups raise funds for library resources, making a lasting contribution to her school community.

I also acknowledge nominee Lisa from Lake Tuggeranong College for her commitment to student wellbeing and Nathan from O'Connor Cooperative School for his contribution as an ACT Children's Week committee member. I have seen Nathan out and about, and I know how committed he is to the wellbeing of young people in the ACT.

Children's Week provides us with the opportunity to reflect on and celebrate the important role that families, educators, carers and communities play in supporting children. We know that when children thrive, families thrive and vice versa, and when children and families thrive, communities thrive. I would like to take this opportunity to thank our ACT village, families, carers, educators, and all our non-government and government providers and partners and the role they play in supporting and setting children up for lifelong learning and success.

Children's Week is a reminder that investing in children is one of the most important investments we can make. The ACT Labor government has a proud history of investing in education, services and opportunities for children. I also know we will always have more work to do, and yesterday's discussion about the Australian Early Development Census outcomes made that clear. I will continue this important work to ensure every child in the ACT has the support, services and opportunities they need to learn, grow and thrive. This is what all children deserve. Thank you and happy Children's Week.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

The Assembly adjourned at 6.10 pm until Tuesday, 1 December 2026 at 10 am.