



DEBATES

OF THE

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

FOR THE

AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

HANSARD

30 May 1989

Tuesday, 30 May 1989

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MR SPEAKER (Mr Prowse) took the chair at 2.30 pm and read the prayer.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

ASBESTOS REMOVAL

MR STEFANIAK: My question is directed to the Minister for Housing and Urban Services. Will the Minister press the Commonwealth to pay all of the cost of removing the asbestos in the ACT? If not, why not?

MRS GRASSBY: We have an agreement with the Commonwealth on the funding. It is a shortfall, as we already know, of quite a considerable amount of money. Our Cabinet will be looking into that and will be pressing the Federal Government for the amount of money to cover this shortfall. I hope I have answered the question. If not, I will take it on notice and give the member more advice on it.

TOURISM

MR JENSEN: My question is directed to the Deputy Chief Minister and Minister responsible for tourism. In view of the need for a bipartisan approach to the development of the tourism industry in the ACT, can the Minister advise why representatives of the Residents Rally were not invited to the launch of Canberra's recent tourist publication, the "Canberra Visitor", on Monday, 29 May 1989, although representatives from the Liberal Party, the No Self Government Party and the Government were included?

MR WHALAN: No, Mr Speaker.

MR JENSEN: I have a supplementary question, Mr Speaker. I take it from that answer that the Minister was not going to answer that question. Is that correct?

MR SPEAKER: Deputy Chief Minister?

MR WHALAN: Yes, Mr Speaker.

MR SPEAKER: That is the answer.

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MR JENSEN: I have a supplementary question then, Mr Speaker. Did the Minister give express directions that the Rally representatives were not to receive invitations?

MR WHALAN: No, Mr Speaker.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

MR COLLAERY: My question is directed again to the Deputy Chief Minister who will recall an ALP election commitment under the heading "Environmental Impact Assessments". One proposal that his party put forward was that there would be a publicly available register of all proposed development projects. Has that register been established? If not, when will it be established? It is on page 3 of the ALP policy document.

MS FOLLETT: Mr Speaker, with your agreement I might take that question from Mr Collaery. Yes, that was indeed an election commitment given by the Australian Labor Party. It is one that will be honoured. As Mr Collaery knows, the work of the appropriate committees in that area is in a very early stage indeed, and I think it is something that the committees may want to consider.

It is also a fact, of course, that on environmental impact legislation this Assembly is yet at too early a stage to have made any progress at all. The Assembly has my undertaking that that register will be established, that it will be publicly available, and that it will be done as quickly as possible.

PROVISIONAL PARLIAMENT HOUSE

MR WOOD: I direct a question to the Chief Minister. Has she heard of announcements today by the Commonwealth Government concerning the future of the old Parliament House? Is she also aware of a variety of proposals that have been made in this Assembly and elsewhere about its future? Does she care to comment on the future of the old Parliament House, since it is such an important part of our Territory?

MS FOLLETT: I thank Mr Wood for the question. Yes, I am indeed aware of the issue of the old Parliament House, and I am of course aware of a statement made in the press by a member of the Liberal Party in the Assembly that it was considered that the old Parliament House might be an appropriate home for this Assembly.

I believe also that that statement had some support from the Residents Rally. I would like it placed on the record that I believe the old Parliament House is totally unsuited to that purpose. It is a national institution; it must be

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preserved as a national institution; and it is too large and much too expensive a proposition for this Assembly.

I am also aware that the Minister for Administrative Services in the Federal Parliament has today made an announcement on the future of the old Parliament House. That announcement, I think, could be categorised as the good news and the bad news. On the good news side, Mr West has said that the old Parliament House will be used as a museum of political history and also that it will be used to accommodate a number of other groups, such as the Australian Heritage Commission and some public facilities.

But, on the bad news side, Mr West has said that no resources will be committed to that in this coming financial year, and indeed not until 1990-91. I think that is quite a reprehensible step by the Federal Government, given that the old Parliament House has been vacant now for some time and that its future has been under question. There is no doubt in my mind that a building of that size and style left unattended and vacant for that period will deteriorate markedly. I think, therefore, that it would be desirable perhaps for much earlier action to be taken on the old Parliament House because it is such an historic building in the ACT.

It has served the people of the ACT and Australia as the seat of Federal government for over 50 years, and it of course has enormous national historical connotation; it is also an important part of Canberra's standing as the national capital. I welcome the Minister's proposal that it will be preserved, and that it will be preserved in an appropriate way, but I believe it is reprehensible that there will be yet another year's delay in action on that.

HOSPITALS

MR MOORE: My question is directed to the Minister for Community Services and Health. On Friday, 26 May, after consultation with the Residents Rally, and I presume others, the Minister appointed two union representatives to the steering committee investigating the principal hospital concept. I congratulate Charles McDonald and Prue Power on their appointments.

Is the Minister aware that other bodies have an equivalent claim, and would he consider calling for nominations from people to represent long-term patients and the Returned Services League, which had approached Mr Holding and which was told that he would "bring the views of the Returned Services League to the attention of the incoming Government"?

MR BERRY: I would like to make it clear that I will be making a statement later in these proceedings about the steering committee. As to the member's questions, I would

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like to take them on notice to give them some consideration and respond to them at a later time, because I have not considered those aspects of the issues that he raised.

COACH TRANSPORT

MRS NOLAN: I direct a question to the Minister for Housing and Urban Services. Given that the New South Wales Government does not allow ACT charter operators to work out of New South Wales, why does the ACT allow New South Wales charter and tour operators to work out of the ACT, taking away both employment and revenue from those ACT coach businesses that are unable to compete with the large New South Wales companies which are subsidised by large school runs?

MRS GRASSBY: I think this question should be directed to the Minister for Tourism. I will take the question on notice, because I am afraid I am not sure about the situation.

MRS NOLAN: I am sorry, but I think it would come under the area of transport.

MRS GRASSBY: I will have to take it on notice and get back to the member.

AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

MR DUBY: My question is directed to the Chief Minister. I refer to an article in the "Canberra Times" of Friday, 26 May, which reported that under her administration 50 per cent of new appointments to government boards and committees, regardless of merit, would be women. Is this so? If so, does she and her Government adhere to the concept of promotion on merit and merit alone in public service matters?

MS FOLLETT: I thank the member for the question, and I am very happy to respond to it. First of all, I would like to lay to rest any suggestion that my statement on the appointment of women to boards and committees had in any way an impact on the promotion on merit in the ACT Administration. They are two quite separate issues, and I am happy to make that quite clear. The ACT Administration will continue to select and promote in the way that it has done, based purely on merit.

But what we are talking about here is the membership of boards and committees that are based on a range of factors, one of which, of course, is the representation of community views. They are not, for the most part, expert bodies. There are some 117 of them, I believe, so they encompass a very broad range of issues of significance in the ACT.

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Those government bodies, like a number of other bodies, have had historically and currently a very, very low representation of women on them, despite the fact that women represent 50 per cent of the population. What I am talking about here is giving women the opportunity to be equally represented on those boards and authorities.

There is no question in my mind that there are adequately qualified women available in the community to serve on these boards, and indeed the Administration has a register of such women who are available. One significant product of all the publicity surrounding this issue has been the number of phone calls and approaches that I, the Women's Unit and the public relations area have had from women who wish to serve on these bodies. They are only too happy to put forward a curriculum vitae and make themselves available, as so many people are when it comes to serving their community.

So I believe that it is quite a reasonable proposition that women who represent 50 per cent of the population - slightly over it, in fact - should be represented in equal proportion on those boards which are there to serve the community. I believe, also, that there are a number of other groups that are not adequately represented. They would include people from non-English speaking backgrounds, Aboriginal people and so on. They are hopelessly under-represented there as well.

But, of course, they do not represent 50 per cent of the community whereas women do. Where there are positions available on those boards, the Government will stick to its intention of making sure that 50 per cent of those positions are taken by women.

ASBESTOS REMOVAL

MR HUMPHRIES: My question is directed to the Minister for Housing and Urban Services. I note the Minister's advice to the Assembly last week that the Government believes that loose asbestos fibre insulation in Canberra homes does pose a potential health risk to residents. I refer the Minister to a publication entitled "Asbestos Insulation in ACT Homes" put out by the Administration, and in particular to page 6 of that publication which has a sentence which reads:

Providing proper precautions are taken to ensure airborne fibres do not enter the living area of houses there is no appreciable risk to residents of houses that contain the loose asbestos fibre insulation material.

I ask the Minister: was this, like the statements of Mr McKenry of the Asbestos Branch, referred to last week, a

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misquoting or a misprint? Given the Government's view that asbestos does pose a health risk, what steps will the Government take to correct the impression given to the Canberra public now in two publications that there is no such threat?

MRS GRASSBY: The point is that it is correct. I am sure that if the member had gone with Mr Stefaniak he would have found that out. If it is not disturbed in any way and is left there, there is no health risk. Unfortunately, people have things done to their houses, particularly in roofs. There was one case in Canberra where a child had a cubby house in the roof and the whole roof was full of asbestos. I was told this, and it was quite frightening.

If it were my child I would be worried because it can take 15 to 20 years before you know that the disease is there. People who do not know that they have asbestos have work done in their houses and, before they know it, it has been moved around. This is where the danger is.

I believe that, for the peace of mind of everybody in Canberra, if they have asbestos in their roofs it should be removed. As we have decided to go ahead and do this, I think the people in Canberra will be very happy that they live in houses without asbestos.

There was an article in the "Canberra Times" when the decision was first made to remove it. In fact I understand the article was part of the Commonwealth's agreeing to become involved. It said the most horrifying thing was for a person to go along and be told that there is asbestos in the roof. I have been told that people collapsed when they were told. The department therefore had to employ staff who could handle people who had traumas about it because their great fear was whether they have had work done which may have disturbed this asbestos that may be affecting their children or them.

So I think the statement is correct: if it is never disturbed there is no fear, but if it is in a house it could be disturbed at any time. It could be disturbed with a slight shake of the earth. They have just had one in the middle of Australia; there is no reason why we could not have one here. That is why every part of the house - I am sure that if the member had gone with Mr Stefaniak he would have seen that - and every single crack is sealed before the asbestos is ever touched.

AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

MR KAINE: I address a question to the Chief Minister further to the one that Mr Duby asked about the equality of representation of women on boards and the like. The Chief Minister will get no argument from the Liberal Party - certainly not from me - if her objective is to have these

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boards comprising 50 per cent women members, if they are qualified for the job. I would take issue with her that some of these positions do not require any expertise at all.

I would submit that all have a requirement of background, qualification or skill of some kind, but that is not the point of my question. I understand, if I heard correctly, during her answer to that earlier question she said that the ACT Administration maintains a register of people who are interested in appointments to such boards.

If that is true, could the Chief Minister tell me who maintains the register, how one gets one's name on it, whether applications are publicly called for people who would like to be on the boards and authorities, and how it is ensured that anybody who wishes to be on a board and who is qualified to be so has his or her name on such a register?

I think in terms of open government and fairness to all the fact that such a register exists ought to be commonly and generally known, and the procedures by which one gets one's name on the list ought to be known also.

MS FOLLETT: Again I am very glad to enunciate further on this question. I would like, first of all, to make it clear that I did not say that these boards require no qualifications or experience. Quite clearly they do require a degree of knowledge of an area. That knowledge required varies greatly, and it varies from board to board and from subject to subject. Some of them are quite clearly things in relation to which a member of the community could well have a valid opinion and a broad experience, but others, of course, call for a slightly higher degree of experience. I think it is true to say that they are not expert advisory boards for the main part but that they are the kinds of bodies where a general appreciation is relevant.

On the question of the register, a register established is at present within the Women's Unit in the ACT Administration. That register, I am quite happy to admit, is in need of upgrading. It is particularly in need of some resources to work on the upgrading of it. I will be looking at what resources are required and how they will be provided in the very near future. I have a paper from the Women's Unit on that subject.

I believe it is appropriate that we should advertise quite widely for positions - not only for positions on the boards but also for people wanting to put their names forward on the register. Having said that, I would like to go even further and say that I would like to call for names not just from women but also from all sectors of the community, including men of similar experience, Aboriginal people, migrant people and so on.

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I think it is a very important matter that people in the community feel that they have an opportunity to serve in this way, that if they do put their name forward they will be treated on their merits and that the representation on these boards is consistent with their representation in the community. I repeat for the umpteenth time that it is my contention that if we are to have those sorts of ambitions for those boards and authorities 50 per cent of their members must be women.

CULTURAL FACILITIES

MR WOOD: I direct another question to the Chief Minister. I draw her attention to reports today concerning the Edmonds report. There is a report in the "Canberra Times", for example, and it deals with, among other matters, arts facilities in the ACT. Is this important report generally available to the community? Could she indicate its major conclusions?

MS FOLLETT: Mr Wood, I think, refers to the Murray Edmonds report which I released last Friday, and I hope that members of this Assembly have now received copies of it. The need for the report arose because of the arts community's expressed concern about the recurrent costs of the kind of large theatre complex and so on that would be undertaken as part of the section 19 development. Mr Edmonds was commissioned specifically to seek out the views of the arts community and to balance, I guess, the need and the demand for such facilities in the section 19 development.

His report has concluded, I believe quite favourably, that subject to detailed feasibility studies and consideration of design issues there is strong support for the theatre complex on section 19. Local organisations in particular would have most call for the playhouse and the studio space, but there is also a lot of scope for use of the large theatre, particularly by touring companies, major companies and so on.

At present of course, as members will know, not very many of those major productions come to Canberra because there is not a venue large enough to accommodate the audiences that they would need to make it viable. The Edmonds report concludes that the theatre complex would maximise commercial opportunities in order to ensure that local organisations have access to the facilities at reduced costs. I think again that is a very important consideration if we have an interest in our local arts groups, as I am sure all members do.

As the report says, of course, one of the most important aspects of the section 19 development is the need for consultation with affected groups, and Murray Edmonds has concluded quite strongly that the planning, the issues and

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so on will be much better addressed in the light of information received from the groups that are to be affected.

I was happy to release the report, and I hope that it will be widely read and its conclusions taken into consideration, particularly by the select committee that this Assembly has formed to look at the section 19 development.

ACTION BUSES - POLICE POWERS

MR STEFANIAK: My question is directed to the Chief Minister. No doubt members are aware of the tragic death of a bus driver yesterday who went to the aid of passengers who were being molested. What is the Chief Minister doing to make Canberra buses safer? Does she propose to address one of the main problems in this area, that is, the lack of police move-on powers around bus interchanges?

MS FOLLETT: I thank Mr Stefaniak for the question. In regard to the death of that bus driver, it was a tragic incident and I am sure everybody would agree with that, the more so because the driver died in the course of his work, and I believe that is particularly tragic. He was not a very old man, from all reports that I have read. Our sympathy goes out to his family because it was an unexpected death and one that occurred in the course of his duty - a very tragic incident.

I take on board Mr Stefaniak's comments about the move-on powers and I know that the Federal Police, for instance, have been lobbying for quite some time for increased powers in that area. I believe some civil liberties issues need to be addressed before we could look seriously at giving the Federal Police further powers in regard to moving people on.

I know that last year a working party which consisted of representatives of the ACT Administration, the Attorney-General's Department and the Australian Federal Police looked at this matter of move-on powers, including the kinds of legislative provisions that might be needed. My Government will be giving consideration to its report in due course, but I repeat that I believe civil liberties considerations need also to be taken into account.

ACT PARKS AND CONSERVATION CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

MR MOORE: My question is directed to the Chief Minister. As the second two-year term of the ACT Parks and Conservation Consultative Committee ended last November, and in view of the already serious disruption to the public consultation process on nature conservation brought about

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by the six-month hiatus period before and after the ACT election, will the Minister act immediately to reconstitute that committee?

MS FOLLETT: Mr Speaker, if I may I would like to take that question on notice. I do not have the answer at my fingertips, and I believe it deserves a considered reply.

CULTURAL FACILITIES

MR KAINE: I would also like to address a question to the Chief Minister in connection with the Edmonds report. I have read the report rather quickly. It seems to me that if one asks a bunch of kids whether they want a bag of lollies, they will say "Yes, we do and we want lots more of them". The kick in that report comes towards the end when the author notes that it will cost \$2.5m a year to run it. Does that suggest that we might not be able to afford this facility even though the kids would like the candy?

MS FOLLETT: Yes, I noted that as well. Like Mr Kaine, I have not had time to study the report in detail but I have seen the estimated costing in it. I think it is something that we need to take on in further consideration of the report and also, as I said, the select committee might want to look at that as well.

The report also comments about the particular management style that might be required for the complex in section 19 and the setting up of a particular type of commercial style operation for a management organisation. I think again that is a matter that needs to be addressed, and that also needs to be weighed against the question of the \$2.5m which I think was a one-off amount to set up the whole management of the complex. As I said, I think that is a matter that needs to be considered in relation to the whole report and to the whole section 19 development.

GOVERNMENT HOUSING

MR COLLAERY: My question is directed to the Minister for Housing and Urban Services. In view of the ACT election commitment to ensuring that public housing is directed towards the most needy, could the Minister please inform the Assembly how often government housing tenants are means tested?

MRS GRASSBY: I will have to get back to the member with that answer. I am afraid I do not have those figures at my fingertips, and I think that deserves an exact answer. I will contact the department.

INNER CANBERRA HERITAGE STUDY

MR MOORE: Can the Chief Minister advise when the inner Canberra heritage study, which was commissioned in 1988 at a cost of \$16,000, by Howard Tanner Associates from Sydney and a Canberra firm, Phillip Cox, whose manager is Eric Martin, and which is understood to have been completed, will be released to the people of the ACT?

MS FOLLETT: I thank the member for that question. If I may, I will take it on notice and provide a reply to him late this afternoon.

HERITAGE AREAS

MR JENSEN: Will the Chief Minister undertake to assure the Assembly that action will be taken to examine the ACT Unit Titles Ordinance to change the current requirement for residential blocks, especially in heritage or potential heritage areas, to be divided into a minimum of four, thereby reducing the possibility of houses like the ones at 10 Murray Crescent and 37 Telopea Park West being demolished in the future?

MS FOLLETT: Yes, I will undertake to review that matter.

DOG CONTROL

MS MAHER: Is the Minister for Housing and Urban Services aware of the reports that last weekend a poultry run maintained by the Salvation Army at its Mancare centre at Fyshwick was destroyed by stray dogs? What will the Government do about the control of dogs in the ACT?

MRS GRASSBY: I am aware of the incident, and I have made some inquiries about it. It is really a shame to think the effort of the staff and the people there has all been destroyed. Dog control is a very big thing. In the two weeks that we have been in government I have had six complaints about dogs. So, next to housing, dogs are really the most important things. I am very aware of it.

Mr Kaine: It is a very important area of management.

MRS GRASSBY: It is a great concern to the ACT Office of City Management. Dog control staff are required in a typical week, I am told, to handle 500 dog complaints and inquiries from the public, to impound 50 dogs and to destroy 30 dogs. In the calendar year 1988, 1,967 dogs were impounded, 1,197 were humanely destroyed and 27 were shot in the rural areas of the ACT after attacking livestock.

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Dog control is costing the taxpayers of the ACT \$460,000 every year, so it really is quite a problem. I might say my Chief Minister would agree that dogs are a problem in most of the inner city parts. People who go walking at night will tell members that they are not really happy about the fact that dogs are not controlled. Unfortunately we have a staff of only nine, and these wonderful officers do the very best they can in dealing with dog licences, the handling of public complaints, capture and collection of stray dogs and the running of the dog pound. I think they do a very good job when I think of all the complaints and all the problems they have.

SCHOOLS WORKING PARTY

MR WHALAN: Mr Speaker, I have an answer to a question that I took on notice on 25 May. Mr Humphries asked me:

Can the Minister confirm that a culture of service working party has been established within the ACT Schools Authority? Can the Minister advise the Assembly of the working party's terms of reference, and will the working party examine issues such as school autonomy and the quality of teaching in ACT schools?

The answer to the member's question is as follows:

A culture of service working party has been established within the ACT Schools Authority.

A culture of service project is designed to build on existing strengths in developing, throughout the ACT school system, a clear focus on providing the best possible service to students, parents and the wider community. It is concerned primarily with service delivery, responsiveness, relationships and empathy with the users of the system. It is also designed to maintain the ACT public school system as the best system in Australia.

The terms of reference of the culture of service working party are, firstly, to consider issues in connection with the ACT Schools Authority's delivery of service to parents, students, the wider community and society as a whole as represented by government; secondly, to provide advice on strategies which might be adopted in addressing the issue of providing the highest quality service; and, thirdly, to provide assistance to individual schools or units in developing strategies for service improvement appropriate to their particular circumstances.

Specific issues to be examined will be identified as the working party consults with its clients and identifies any areas of concern.

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PUBLIC HOSPITAL REDEVELOPMENT - STEERING COMMITTEE
Ministerial Statement

MR BERRY (Minister for Community Services and Health), by leave: Before I begin my statement I would like to announce to this Assembly that I have taken up the matter, on which I will report, with other parties here. In October 1988 the Minister for the Arts and Territories, Mr Holding, commissioned Dr Brendon Kearney to conduct an independent review of health services in the ACT. The review was established to consider whether, having regard to population size and comparable services elsewhere in Australia, the level of health services in Canberra was adequate. Dr Kearney was also asked to recommend specifically on public hospital redevelopment needs in the ACT. I think members would all recall the publicity which surrounded the inquiry conducted by Dr Kearney.

One of Dr Kearney's key recommendations was that the one principal hospital concept be adopted in the ACT as a basis for restructuring hospital services and to provide for more efficient utilisation of health resources in the ACT. Mr Holding established a steering committee in February this year to develop further the concept and to report to the ACT Government by September 1989.

Briefly, the one principal hospital concept involves one major referral centre of around 600 to 700 beds supported by a community hospital of around 250 to 300 beds. The principal hospital would, from one site, provide the full range of specialties that are currently available at one or both of the two sites of our public hospitals. It would also be the major trauma centre and provide teaching and research facilities.

There are various options for implementing the one principal hospital concept, although Dr Kearney recommended the development of one of the major hospitals as the principal hospital, providing the full range of services presently provided by Royal Canberra Hospital and Woden Valley Hospital, to be complemented by a smaller community hospital.

The steering committee was appointed to look at all the issues associated with the range of options available and to report to me by September, as I have mentioned earlier. I believe it is imperative that the committee examines all possible options, and I have taken steps to ensure that this will happen. The membership of the committee includes representatives from the ACT Community and Health Service, the Public Hospitals Interim Board of Directors, Calvary Hospital and representatives from Treasury, Infrastructure Division and the Policy Development Branch within the ACT Administration.

I was, however, concerned that the membership did not include representatives of a significant sector of the community - namely, the trade union movement - since

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contributions from all sectors of the community, particularly the trade unions, played a part in shaping the recommendations of Dr Kearney's report.

In line with this Government's commitment to support and encourage active participation in the direction and administration of the ACT public hospital system at all levels, I have appointed Mr Charles McDonald, Secretary-Treasurer of the Trades and Labour Council of the ACT, and Ms Prue Power, Secretary of the Canberra branch of the Australian Nursing Federation, to the committee. Both new members will bring a broad range of experience in health issues to the committee and ensure that the interests of the community generally are adequately represented.

In addition, their membership will ensure that management of the impact on hospital staff of any proposed changes is properly considered. I am confident that the broad range of expertise within the membership will ensure that issues such as access by the community to services, capital and recurrent costs, the nature and quality of services which should be provided, and the need to plan effectively now in order to provide comprehensive services to the ACT community in the future are all addressed with the best interests of the community in mind.

To familiarise Mr McDonald and Ms Power with progress to date, I have arranged for the general manager of the ACT Community and Health Service to provide them with full access to the committee's earlier decisions. These briefings will assist both new members to make an immediate and effective contribution to the committee's deliberations and its final report.

I am keen to progress this matter because I am acutely aware of the uncertainty being experienced by both hospital clients and staff. However, while I recognise that the addition of two new members may delay the steering committee's final report, the report itself will be enhanced by their contribution. I wish to assure the community that the delay will not be significant.

The report will represent the most potentially far-reaching study of public hospital needs ever undertaken in the ACT. It will have a significant impact on the provision of both public and private hospital beds in the ACT for the foreseeable future. Once I have received the report, I will ensure that appropriate consultation regarding the steering committee's recommendations is undertaken, and I look forward to presenting the report to the Assembly to facilitate the process.

MR KAINE (Leader of the Opposition), by leave: Mr Speaker, I really have to state my concern - I think it is a concern of a lot of people in a lot of organisations in the community - at this change in the constitution of this steering committee on public hospital redevelopment at this stage of the inquiry. Following Mr Berry's logic on this

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matter, he should also appoint a couple of people from the Australian Medical Association, perhaps one or two from the Hospital Employees Federation, even one or two from the users of the hospital services of this city, if it is the intention that sectional interests are to be represented on this steering committee.

I submit, Mr Speaker, that the steering committee was doing its job quite well without the assistance of these two trade union representatives who can do nothing but influence the steering committee in one particular direction, and that is the direction in which the trade union movement would like the hospital system in this city to go. I believe, Mr Speaker, it is a blatant act of favouritism and patronage on the part of the Labor Party, and the Minister in particular, to add these particular two people to the committee.

It is not that I have anything personal against either of the two people concerned, but I think it is a matter of major concern that such a committee, having gone pretty well halfway through its inquiry, should suddenly find itself saddled with two trade union representatives. I submit that the logic on which they have been put on this steering committee at this stage is quite flawed. I ask the Minister now to consider the appointment of the representatives of the other sectional interests - if not all of them, certainly the users of the hospital service - to make sure that their interests are properly represented in this inquiry.

ROUTINE OF BUSINESS AND MATTER OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Temporary Orders

Motion (by **Mr Whalan**), by leave, agreed to:

That, unless otherwise ordered, the following amendments to the standing orders be adopted for the remainder of this Assembly:

Standing order 74 (as amended)-

Add at the end thereof the following:

":Provided further that on each Wednesday and Thursday, Presentation of papers; Ministerial statements, by leave; and Matters of public importance follow Questions without notice in the ordinary routine of business."

Standing order 79 -

Omit "4", substitute "2".

HOUSING POLICY REVIEW

Discussion of Matter of Public Importance

MR SPEAKER: I have received a letter from Mr Duby proposing that a matter of public importance be submitted to the Assembly for discussion, namely:

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The importance of the Government's housing policy review in addressing housing needs in the public and private sectors.

MR DUBY (3.11): Mr Speaker, in raising a matter of public importance on the proposed ACT housing policy review the No Self Government Party at the outset states that we support this initiative by the Government. However, I am concerned that this review may be used as a means of showing concern and doing little or nothing.

Housing is of fundamental importance to all Canberrans and a fundamental review of all housing policies at the local level is long overdue. While the terms of reference released by the Minister for Housing and Urban Services are broad, there are some key issues that we believe should be addressed during the review. With recent increases in interest rates, home ownership has become more difficult for families to achieve and to continue to meet repayments.

The deposit gap has become a critical issue, and the Government's role in assisting first home buyers needs critical review. While the Commonwealth Government's first home owners scheme is intended to assist in this area, the ACT Government has a responsibility to ensure that there is an adequate land supply so that there is no rapid escalation of land prices which has made home ownership unattainable for families in other cities of Australia.

The regulation of the planning and housing industry should be streamlined so that adverse impacts on house prices are minimised while at the same time consumers are protected.

We are also concerned that low start loans in a period of increasing interest rates can lead to major problems for families. There have been many examples of young home buyers having to sell their houses as a consequence of these practices. The reality of escalating repayments and increasing amounts owing as a consequence of capitalisation of deferred interest payments is an issue that should be closely examined in the housing policy review. I do not deny that these schemes can assist certain families, but their application by private lenders requires close and careful consideration.

There are other issues which also impact upon the deposit gap, and I wish to raise the question of stamp duty remissions for first home buyers or income tested first home buyers. I understand that the ACT is the only State or Territory where no concessions are made in stamp duty for first home buyers, and this matter should be rectified as soon as possible. Legal fees and conveyancing costs are too high in the ACT, and in other States I know that cheaper but equally effective services are provided. These costs represent a significant part of the deposit gap, and I believe that costs in these areas should also be encompassed by the review.

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Until now, the ACT has had only one way of assisting home buyers, and that is through the Commissioner for Housing loans scheme. In the Minister's statement last week, she said that she would expect advice on the improved operation and targeting of the scheme. I endorse this view. The current income criteria should be examined and the scheme should receive much better publicity. Over the years it has helped many thousands of families in the ACT, but more effective use could be made of these funds through more innovative lending strategies.

The Commissioner for Housing loans scheme should not be the sole method for the ACT Government assisting home buyers. We consider that the ACT Housing Trust should sponsor construction of houses for sale to home buyers, as happens in other States. In addition, the option of rental purchase from the Housing Trust could fill an important gap in ACT assistance to first home buyers. Similarly we support the sale of Housing Trust dwellings to tenants, provided that it is subject to some tight criteria.

It is not acceptable for the Housing Trust to sell off its dwellings in inner urban areas where it is important for the trust to maintain its land holdings to provide potential for future urban renewal, to ensure that low income families have the opportunity to live close to community services and work opportunities. I am aware that the Housing Trust released a draft sale to tenants policy late last year. That policy should also be closely examined in the process established by the Government.

While my address so far has concentrated on home ownership strategies, do not take this to mean that my party places public rental housing as a lower priority. The No Self Government Party will not support a reduction in the role of the Housing Trust in rental housing, and the number of houses available should increase in line with the growing need in the community. The rental housing programs of the Housing Trust should be reviewed, and we believe that the trust should make greater efforts to encourage tenant participation. Both housing cooperatives and tenant participation are important ways of involving the clients of the trust and would encourage greater tenant responsibility and control of their housing circumstances.

The Government should not overlook the needs of special groups in the community, and I was pleased to see the terms of reference reflect the needs of those groups. We have had a recent report on youth homelessness and demonstrations by young people outside Parliament House drawing attention to their homelessness. It is important for the Housing Trust to address these special needs.

Also the special needs of aged people cannot be forgotten. While the Housing Trust has given some priority in recent years to aged persons units, expenditure in this area will need to increase as the proportion of aged people in the

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ACT increases. The housing policy review should also look at steps to improve the effectiveness of the ACT Housing Trust. As an organisation operating in an area which has important implications for social justice in the community, it must be a matter of high priority to publicise and inform the community of the benefits available from the trust.

Greater publicity should be given to its activities, and this should be in the form of plain English pamphlets and information easily understood by clients and pamphlets published in other commonly used community languages. Above all, the Housing Trust should be consistent in its decision making, since decisions in the trust have a major impact on the lives of clients.

We are also concerned about the efficiency of repairs and maintenance carried out by the Housing Trust. The trust should aim to reduce the period of time that houses are vacant. The housing policy review must identify measures to improve performance in that area as it is currently rather scandalous.

There are important issues that should be advanced at the same time as progress is made on the housing policy review. I recognise that the review cannot address heritage, leasehold and planning matters but these issues can have a significant impact on housing in the Territory.

A critical issue for both the private and public sectors is the question of planning and the finalisation of a small scale residential development policy. I urge the Government to give this matter early attention, because it could provide a way of adding to housing choice in Canberra.

I raised the review as a matter of public importance because of the need to address our critical housing problems as a matter of urgency. It is important for this Assembly to debate these issues early in the life of the review process.

Mr Speaker, I welcome the housing policy review and the undertakings by the Minister that the review will be about real results and advise here and now that my party and this Assembly will closely monitor the process to ensure that real results do occur.

MRS GRASSBY (Minister for Housing and Urban Services) (3.19): Before I speak to the matter of public importance, may I offer my condolences to the Deputy Chief Minister whose father died this morning. I do not know whether the rest of the Assembly knows that. Mr Speaker, the Government welcomes Mr DUBY's contribution to the housing debate. Housing is one of the most important of my portfolios. Along with other political groups in this Assembly, the No Self Government Party gave me its view on the terms of reference for the housing policy review. I

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tabled those terms of reference last Thursday. In my speech I said that the review would be about real results and that we would talk to all groups during the review. This meant groups outside as well as all-party groups in the Assembly.

I also said that the terms of reference have been framed so that all issues in the area of public and private sector housing, the industry and the role of government could be properly considered. In tabling the terms of reference, I said that the review would have regard to changes in the Commonwealth Government housing policy. I have been told that the Commonwealth Minister for Housing and Aged Care, Mr Peter Staples, will be writing to me in the very near future about changes to the Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement.

These changes will be considered as part of the review and could have a major bearing on its outcomes. The ACT is not yet a formal party to the agreement but operates under the same arrangements. With self-government it is my view that we should now take our full place with the States. I believe that the terms of reference enable the issues raised by Mr DUBY to be properly considered.

I would now like to comment on the issues raised by Mr DUBY. I took into account what I thought he would raise after speaking to him on the review. I turn first to home ownership. The Government recognises the problems created by higher interest rates, especially for low to moderate income first home buyers. I know that low start loans can cause serious problems, and I expect that home purchase will be a major concern for the review. The private sector's view must be taken into account to see how we can improve the form of housing loans. This has become a very serious situation for young people today.

The review will also address the related costs of buying a home, such as stamp duty, legal fees and conveyancing costs. The Government is anxious to ensure that ACT home buyers are not faced with any unnecessary costs. We are watching the effect of the private sector land development. The ACT Administration holds about 2,000 blocks of land at the moment. Most of this will be offered for sale over the next 12 months. Through our planning and land supply measures we must aim to keep land prices as low as we can in order to help first home buyers.

For example, the ACT is a partner in broad acre estate development with the Housing Industry Association and the Master Builders Association on two separate estates. These estates are to produce low cost housing, and the developers are required to sell 60 per cent for first home buyers. With regard to the Commissioner for Housing loans scheme I have already stated that I would expect the review to provide advice on ways in which the scheme could be improved. A range of lending programs similar to those operated by housing authorities elsewhere in Australia could be a result.

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The question of the ACT Housing Trust constructing homes for sale to low and moderate income earners has not been considered so far, but it has been brought up by many of the groups. Particular mention has been made of problems experienced by aged residents. Many older people wish to acquire houses more suited to their lifestyles, but they are not eligible for Housing Trust assistance. I would be happy for this debate to be expanded to consider the broader question raised by Mr Doby, of construction of houses for sale by the Housing Trust, as this was also brought up by many groups.

The sale of public housing to tenants is a complex issue. I have already given the Government's commitment that the stock of public housing in inner urban areas will not be reduced. The Housing Trust needs to increase stock in inner urban areas, and I had the pleasure of opening a new project in Turner last Friday. It provides a wonderful example of new houses in older areas, and I am happy to say that some members of the Assembly were there when this was opened. The Government welcomes the No Self Government Party's support for the continued role of the Housing Trust in the area of rental accommodation.

I said last week that housing is a very high priority on the Government's list. We will introduce new schemes as they are needed. A local government and community housing program has recently been commenced by the Housing Trust. I support the concept of community housing, and the trust is seeking to become more deeply involved in this area. With regard to tenant participation, I have said to the trust that I wish to see more ways develop to ensure greater tenant responsibility and control. The review will also be responsible for developing detailed proposals for the housing and tenant council and the rental bond trust promised by the Chief Minister in her speech.

Terms of reference for the review clearly demonstrate the Government's desire to ensure that the needs of special interest groups are addressed in the line of our social justice policies. We will talk with these groups to ensure that their needs and desires are properly reflected in the advice provided to the Government. This Government agrees that youth homelessness is a tragic issue for our society. I am presently studying a report on youth accommodation which has just been finished for the ACT Housing Trust. I hope to release that report soon.

Our waiting list for houses has been growing, and I share Mr Doby's concern for delays in the repairs to public housing. I am very concerned about this when I see empty houses that people could be using. The review will address this issue and provide advice to me on measures that could be introduced to reduce vacancy rates caused by such delays. We already have a consultant working on this program. I have the pleasure of announcing to the Assembly that the Commissioner for Housing, Mr Ken Horsham, will

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manage the review on a full-time basis. He has already started work in this capacity and will be supported by a range of staff from throughout the Administration as required. Should it be necessary, the review will seek specialist advice to address particular issues as they arise.

I am confident that the review that we have started will help the Government achieve its objective of reform in the housing policy of the ACT. The Government has decided that a progress report should be prepared by August-September detailing the steps that have already been taken. The review should prepare a final progress report by December. Progress statements will be issued as the housing policy review proceeds. We do not wish to have a report written and put on the shelf and nothing done about it. In future I expect that we will have a continuing review of housing policy as the Government proceeds to finetune its housing policies.

MR STEFANIAK (3.28): I think it is very appropriate that the question of housing is discussed at this stage in the life of this Assembly because it is certainly a question that is causing a great deal of concern in the Canberra community. I welcome the review of the Minister for Housing and Urban Services, into which the Liberal Party has had some input. She has our policy and I have also given her the names of a number of people who may be able to assist in the inquiry. I certainly hope the inquiry will be not a cosmetic one but a real one and that it will come up with some sensible solutions to the problem in the ACT.

I want to deal with two points in this debate. Firstly, I will state the Liberal Party's position in relation to the question of housing in the ACT. In relation to private housing, we want to ensure an adequate supply of land for new housing at affordable prices. We want to encourage and facilitate alternative housing concepts such as aged persons units, dual occupancy and urban consolidation. We believe that this will better utilise existing resources and infrastructure and allow residents, particularly the aged, to remain in their areas. We wish to see deregulation of the real estate industry by providing for industry self-regulation, requiring the establishment of a fidelity guarantee fund and a tenants bond protection scheme. We wish to abolish stamp duty for first home buyers who comply with an income and assets test, thereby providing an incentive for people to own their own homes.

In relation to housing finance, we want to see made available concessional finance to those in genuine need; we would like to see a regular review of the levels of concessions provided and also the introduction of appropriate safeguards to prevent the inevitable abuse. We wish the Government to examine the possibility of selling, by tender, to a lending institution the operation of the Commissioner for Housing loans scheme. Concessions should

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continue to apply, with the ACT Government meeting part of the cost of those concessions. Such arrangements would need to be considered with regard to the Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement and would result in a substantial increase in the availability of concessional finance to home buyers.

Regarding public rental housing, we wish to see government housing being provided only to those in long term genuine need and to those with urgent and special needs. Those persons in genuine short to medium term need should be provided with rent relief for private sector housing with a view to eliminating the waiting list for government housing. We wish to see reviewed on a regular basis the levels of rent relief and government housing rents in line with market rents and individual needs.

Further, we would like to see that arrears of rent on government properties are paid, bearing in mind that tenants are not asked to pay more rent than they can genuinely afford. We also would like the Government to ensure that housing provided is suitable for the needs of the occupants and to provide for special accommodation needs where necessary. I think it is most important, Mr Speaker, to encourage government tenants to purchase their government homes when they can afford to do so. A minimum occupancy period should apply to allow an orderly transition here.

We would also like to see reviewed the operations of the ACT Housing Trust, with a view to improving its efficiency and cost-effectiveness, particularly in the area of repairs and maintenance to government housing.

Mr Speaker, there are a number of things this Assembly can do, but there are a number of other problems which are most relevant to this particular debate. Recently there have been huge rises in mortgage interest rates, and this has pushed the cost of buying a home far beyond the reach of most Australian families. Since last June savings bank home mortgage interest rates have risen from 13.5 per cent to a record 16 per cent, and now they are forecast to go as high as 18 per cent, which used to be the bank charge interest rate.

The Hawke Government-induced record 17 per cent, and soon to be 18 per cent, mortgage interest rate already represents a \$40 a week cost rise so far this financial year to over \$270 a week for a family repaying a mortgage of \$84,000, and it is already being exceeded by up to 1 per cent of specific loans for some major lending institutions.

This cost will rise by a further \$30 a week to more than \$300 a week when interest rates hit their forecast 18 per cent later this year, representing a total rise of \$70 a week since last June. Most Australian families would be far better off swapping Labor's tax cut, wage rise deal with the Australian Council of Trade Unions, for the lower

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interest rates depend on fixing up the economic mess caused by the Federal Government.

A \$70 a week increase in repayments on an average home mortgage is almost four times as much as this Wednesday's expected tax cut of \$18 a week, and almost three times the expected wage rise of \$25 a week over the next two years.

April's REIA-MGICA survey confirmed that high interest rates were the major cause of the continuing deterioration in the housing affordability index to a record 40 per cent of gross annual family income compared with the 25 per cent maximum allowed by lending institutions. This means a family on average earnings cannot afford to borrow the money needed to buy an average home.

Those Australians, and those Canberrans, who are paying off home mortgages are now suffering severely and unfairly through increased mortgage payments or longer repayment times. Many will never pay off their mortgages and will go further and further into debt unless the Hawke Government cuts the huge interest rates, but that Government's policy is to keep interest rates high and to push them even higher, to try to fix up the mess it has made of the Australian economy, particularly after the April economic statement.

Mr Speaker, the Hawke Government has deliberately chosen high interest rates as its major economic policy weapon in dealing with our balance of payments and inflation crisis, and Mr Hawke has warned that interest rates will stay high and could go even higher until the economic crisis is resolved. I do not think we can really talk about ACT housing without looking at the disastrous effects that interest rates are having in our community.

The question is a very complex one. There are a number of things that we, as an assembly, can do. There are also a number of things that have to be done on a national level. The real answer lies not in interest rate ceilings or other simple solutions or cosmetic measures. As I said, I hope the Minister's review does not turn out to be cosmetic. One of the real solutions lies in getting the economy right, and that is very much a Federal responsibility as well as a territorial responsibility.

MR COLLAERY (3.35): The Residents Rally thanks Mr Duby for putting this matter on. It is an appropriate matter of public importance, and the Rally also notes the comments by the Minister responsible, including comments that Mr Ken Horsham, the current Commissioner, will be detailed to look at the housing policy review, with staff assigned to help him for that purpose. I regret to advise the Minister for Housing and Urban Services that the Rally is unable to volunteer any staff for that project.

A member: Why not?

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A member: You are not Robinson Crusoe.

MR COLLAERY: That is an in joke, Mr Speaker. I am sure it is not lost on the Minister. The proposals put forward in this Assembly, in the absence of some of the political hyperbole, are all very much put forward in a bipartisan spirit, and one welcomes the fact that this Assembly can work on a collegiate basis on that score. But the Rally also acknowledges that the Minister, in her important reply to the matter raised by Mr DUBY, of course had a comprehensive and prepared argument.

The Rally notes that we received notice of this discussion of a matter of public importance shortly before we walked into this chamber - in fact minutes before. The Rally would wish to draw, respectfully, to your attention, Mr Speaker, the practice in the House of Representatives which, in the absence of guidelines in the standing orders here, would normally be persuasive in this Assembly, and that is that usually in that House across the lake about two hours' notice is given of items of this nature.

One notes, fortunately, that the Minister responsible seems to have had that notice, and that is probably good for the public interest, but it once again indicates that the Rally has been left out in the cold on this issue, because Mr DUBY was in our office this morning and could have told us.

The Rally has had a fully developed housing policy for a number of months. It notes that evident in the ACT now and of great concern to us is the polarisation in the housing situation of the haves and have-nots - the comfortable and those in considerable discomfort in their position, either in private housing with over-extended mortgage commitments or in public housing which does not altogether suit their interests or which is not related to their current situation. Many of the possible means of alleviating the current housing crisis, particularly for low income earners and first home buyers, require examination and intervention at Federal level, and we in this Assembly must acknowledge that aspect.

We also acknowledge that under the Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement each State or Territory is able to use the funds provided to it according to that State's or Territory's priorities. That allows us a choice of home purchase assistance, rental housing, public rental housing and housing assistance for special needs groups. I note that Mr Horsham is in the public gallery. He would agree that we have that and more in the ACT, and the situation for the housing policy review is good. However, the Rally notes with concern that successive ACT administrations under this Federal Labor Government did not apply the full \$58m from the Grants Commission allocation for housing in the 1987-88 budget. We have never received an adequate explanation for that.

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The Minister has stated that her department is looking at innovative and creative ways of resolving the many problems in the housing policy review. The Rally acknowledges that a lot of that is icing on a cake which has gone soft in the centre because of the policies of the Federal Labor Government. On that score the Rally joins with Mr Stefaniak in expressing concern at the apparent disinterest of the current Federal Treasurer, who goes abroad at this time of crisis in the mortgage belt throughout Australia.

The Rally endorses the abolition of stamp duty in the same categories as have been generally proposed on this floor. The Rally believes an adequate supply of serviced land via the land sales division of the ACT Administration is a necessity but also has to be correlated with measures in the public rental market where the Rally is interested in ensuring that tenants are means tested with some regularity. The Rally understands that public housing has been means tested only since 1974.

Market rates for home loans should be paid by those who can afford them. As approximately 90 per cent of new applicants receive social security benefits, obviously in the initial years we are subsidising, either through Federal indirect subsidy or out of our budget, much of that public housing at a high rate. The Rally waits with interest to hear the Minister's response to the question without notice asked earlier as to the standard and efficacy of means testing for government housing tenants. If more of that housing can be freed up for those who are clearly in priority need, that obviously is an aspect of the overall decision on whether we are to increase or decrease public housing stocks.

The Rally will support the ACT Housing Trust in maintaining and increasing public housing rental stock, subject to those qualifications that we mentioned earlier. The Rally wishes to see the trust conduct regular rent reviews to ensure that market rents are paid by those who can afford them, and the Rally would of course support a tenant purchase option scheme that would not only serve to increase the home interest of the parties paying rent but also preserve public housing stocks on a planned basis throughout the various suburbs and sections of Canberra.

The Rally believes very strongly that before further public housing is built, amended, or reconstructed there should be a mechanism established for the input of tenants, the community and particularly residents to the design, siting and management of public housing in the ACT. The Rally supports innovative measures, such as urban infill and small scale residential redevelopment, subject of course to the well-known and well-stated environmental and residential amenity issues. The right of the aged to live where they have lived is obviously recognised by all in this house, but that right must not transcend the historic and heritage areas of the Territory and, similarly, environmental and other concerns.

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The Rally congratulates the Housing Trust on its developments for the aged, such as the one close to the Yarralumla shops. In this Territory we should see more of those developments which are close to shopping and which fit within the aged persons unit accommodation criteria.

The Rally also thinks that the trust must take practical steps to tackle the plight of the homeless, especially homeless youth and those in crisis. We are looking for better communication between the trust and the groups in the suburbs which have been allocated homes for respite and other emergency housing arrangements.

The Rally of course has a proposal, which it hopes the Minister will look at carefully, to introduce a scheme for public housing tenants to take up equity shareholding in their homes. The Rally has devised fairly sophisticated proposals to deal with unit purchasing and percentage buying, and those details have been available for some time from the Rally. The benefits of this progressive equity participation scheme, the PEP scheme as the Rally says, would be to allow tenants to bridge the deposit gap by progressively taking up small shares in their homes as circumstances permit. As we know, one of the biggest factors facing particularly young couples is that they borrow the deposit from relatives and are not altogether frank with lenders, and of course they get into a disastrous situation when they are on those easy start loans.

The other advantage of the PEP scheme, as far as the Rally sees it, is that tenants have a vested interest in maintaining the homes, and that would indirectly reduce the maintenance vote of the Housing Trust. Therefore, they can buy it, and at the same time they can maintain it and be kept to the mark on that score. The Rally thinks that the PEP scheme will free up some capital investment from the trust in due course. We can, as Mr DUBY mentioned, look at some joint venture along the scale of the South Australian Housing Trust in that area. The Housing Trust could look at directing the maintenance and supervisory resources of the trust to ensure that those activities blend in more with other maintenance and supervisory roles elsewhere in the ACT Administration.

The Rally supports the ACT Housing Trust draft policies on the sales to tenants at market prices of homes, provided that, as Mr DUBY said, overall stocks, or percentage of stocks, are retained in suburbs, and that we do not sell off our silver in the older suburbs.

MR WOOD (3.45): I join my colleagues in expressing the importance that we attach to the question of housing. Few issues in our society today are more important. If we think back on our own lives, we can think of the enormous resources and the time and effort we have put into our homes, reflecting, I suppose too infrequently, how

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fortunate we are to have them. Few areas also bring more difficulties. As newly elected members of parliament we are coming to grips with that.

I guess that other members, like me, are receiving no small number of approaches from our electorate concerning housing. It is the most important thing in people's lives that they have somewhere to live, preferably somewhere satisfactory.

However, I want to take my time today to refer to one area specifically of the housing problem, and that is the area of youth homelessness. Within that context I want to emphasise in particular the community attitude to youth homelessness. I believe it is a major problem in the Canberra community, as it is in the rest of Australia. I do not believe that everybody else in Canberra, or in Australia, thinks that way. I think there is a fairly large general opinion that there is no problem there or, if it admits to a problem, it is that it is not the community's problem, that it is the parents' problem. I want to state as forcibly as I can that that is not right; there is a problem and it is our problem. It is one to which we have to attend.

I was delighted to hear the Minister for Housing and Urban Services say that she will release that report on youth housing - whatever title it will have - that has been sitting around for just a little time, I expect because the people who prepared it have been waiting for a government to which it may be submitted.

There is an urgent need in this community for crisis accommodation for young people. Statistics are available. The real statistics are rather more difficult to come by, but let me give some. I have information that in 1987-88 we provided accommodation in our various homes for some 500 young people. The appalling aspect of that is that about 100 of those were under 15 years of age. It takes quite a deal, I should think, to drive people of that young age out of their homes into the streets and into emergency accommodation. The particular worry about this, of course, is that they have no income, nor do they have access to welfare. They are just out there. Suddenly a crisis has developed in their homes and there they are, looking for somewhere to go. I challenge anybody in this community to say that 100 people under 15 years of age on our streets in any one year is not a crisis and that they do not need immediate attention. The ACT Schools Authority reported in 1986 that 200 of its students in secondary schools and secondary colleges had crisis needs, emergency needs, at some stage in that year, that they were not living in their family homes. So it is just some measure of the problem.

We do not have clear statistics of the number of people who, it is claimed, live out there in the streets. Those sorts of statistics are much harder to come by, and all sorts of claims are made. I will make none, except that they are there and that we need to attend to them.

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While I am on this topic, I want to give credit to those people in the various homes, the various types of establishments we have, who care for these young people who come through. They do a marvellous job. I want to give credit to the people in the ACT Housing Trust, not just those who handle the youth workers but also those who handle all the housing problems. They come under the most severe pressure that we can imagine. We come under some of that pressure but we see only a small part of it. So let us acknowledge the work that is being done there.

But the problem compounds. The real problem for a lot of these people comes when they leave the crisis accommodation to which they can first be directed. These are not short term problems. They are not problems that can be solved by sending a young person into one of the establishments for a six-week period or whatever the period is for which they are entitled to stay; the real problem comes subsequently. It is evidenced by the fact that to a very large degree the Administration does not know where those young people go to when they leave the crisis accommodation.

Sometimes they go back home, to whatever threatening situation may be there. Sometimes they go to garages or friends' places, but wherever they go it is for the short term. The housing review that we are now undertaking has to consider the long term future for those people. We have to provide for them; that is what we are here to do.

For the most part, the Government and the private sector do not provide for them. How can they provide in the established modes that we have, the established housing patterns, for someone who is young and without income? We need to extend the range of services that we have to offer.

Let us go up in the age level a little, beyond 16 and towards 18. They can go into government housing and private housing, but in practice they very rarely do so because of the severe constraints on eligibility and financial requirements. Again, lack of income is crucial.

How can young people who may be getting their act together, maybe continuing at school, and who are pretty much in control of themselves, if not the circumstances in which they find themselves, go into private accommodation? Bonds, furniture and the authority to sign leases are the sort of detail that is required.

So, no matter how good the people are, they are in trouble. If the people are not in total control of themselves, if they are not fully able to see the circumstances in which they find themselves and take action, it is a very difficult problem indeed. So we have a whole range of very specific needs to which we must respond.

I am pleased that there is a relatively short term on this, so that we may be able to respond to them fairly soon. We

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need, among other things, a very coordinated approach between the government and the non-government sectors, between the bureaucracy and the groups out there which are concerned, so that we can have a concerted attack on that problem. Above all - I say this at the outset of this review - we need to understand that there is a problem there, and there is a very serious problem there. Let us accept first of all that with youth homelessness we have that problem, and from that point we may be able to proceed to do something truly constructive.

MR BERRY (Minister for Community Services and Health) (3.55): I think Mr Stefaniak was correct when he said that the housing issue is a complex one. However, I must say that I am disappointed in what I saw as a rather simplistic response to the problem which, from where I sit, really related to privatisation, deregulation and disposal of the public housing stock. I think we have to take a more responsible view in the provision of public housing to assist those people who rely on my area of responsibility for a roof over their heads.

I welcome Mr Colleary's commitment to maintenance of the public housing stock. I think that the issue of public housing is a very, very important one and one on which my colleague has rightly focused attention in relation to the youth of this country.

What I would like to turn to now is the way in which my area of responsibility deals with housing. Members may not know of all of the good work that my portfolio does in the housing area, nor the way our services assist people who may not be able to live fully independent lives.

I want to tell members about some of these services and outline some of the future directions that we will be taking. Many of the people who use our services need help to achieve independent living. It is our objective to help clients achieve this as easily and effectively as possible. For other clients access to alternative housing is critical. Where their homes have been destroyed through violence, abuse, neglect or poverty, housing is the most vital step for them to continue to be useful members of our society. My portfolio provides funding to operate refuges, halfway houses and foster care. We provide respite services - that is, services that give clients and their carers some time out. We operate a nursing home as well as hostels for those with intellectual disabilities or suffering from mental illness.

We provide homes for wards, services to keep people in their homes rather than in institutions, and sometimes financial aid to help people stay in their homes. We also provide accommodation for people awaiting the pleasure of the courts. The supported accommodation assistance program, more commonly known as SAAP, is an essential response to those who are homeless. We fund refuges, halfway houses and services to help people who are in crisis.

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Youth housing workers and migrant housing workers provide support to people making the transition from supported accommodation to independent living. The SAAP is a joint cost-shared program with the Commonwealth. Together with my State colleagues we are negotiating with the Commonwealth on a SAAP mark II agreement which will cover the next five years of the program.

I am confident it will be an improvement on an already excellent program. The key features already agreed on are to concentrate closely on the most needy groups, to focus on transitional assistance to those moving to independent living and to look to more permanent housing options for those who enter SAAP services. On this latter point I look forward to working with my colleague Mrs Grassby.

Some of our successes with SAAP include an excellent range of women's services. This will soon be complemented by a new refuge for victims of domestic violence. We have a successful youth housing outreach service and, of course, Ainslie Village. Working closely with the village and the ACT Housing Trust, we are redeveloping the area in accordance with the residents' wishes.

It continues to provide an essential source of alternative housing for low income earners in the ACT. Brian Burdekin, in his recent report on youth homelessness, made some stringent criticisms of State and Commonwealth governments. I will be attending a meeting in Canberra on 14 June of social welfare Ministers when I and fellow Ministers will look for real solutions to real problems with a national focus.

I also anticipate introducing specific issues to reduce homelessness in the ACT. I am looking in particular at better coordination of services and improved training resources. I am keen to look at the reasons our young people leave home and to address those reasons wherever possible. If they do leave home, we must make every effort to assist them with reconciliation but, at the same time, preserve the right of choice for these young people.

The other side of the coin is that there are many people who want to stay at home but who lack the necessary skills and mobility to do so. There are some Commonwealth programs to help these people and some State services - in our case, an excellent community nursing service for those who are ill.

A major improvement for these people was the introduction of HACC, the home and community care program. It aims to keep people at home as long as possible and to keep them out of institutions. We have some excellent programs in Canberra; for example, respite care services and domestic services to help around the house - to mow lawns, change light globes, wash dirty linen and the like. We have centres for the elderly to visit and services for those who cannot use other forms of transport.

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As the numbers of elderly and disabled increase, the benefits of the HACC program will become even more obvious. I have given priority to improving services for the younger disabled and to helping our ethnic aged and disabled access these services. We also provide housing for those who need more care than can ever be provided by the family at home. Bruce Hostel, Jindalee Nursing Home and Hennessy House will all be familiar names to you. Residents contribute to the cost of their accommodation and are helped in daily living by expert, compassionate staff. I am keen to ensure that the rights of these residents are protected. The recent Commonwealth report "I'm Still an Individual" will be useful in this regard.

I am conscious of the comments that Dr Kearney made about Jindalee Nursing Home - in particular, that there are unsatisfactory design features that will be difficult to overcome - and am looking to see what can be done to improve the living standards of those residents.

The right of each of our residents to as normal a lifestyle as is possible is paramount. The focus in ACT intellectual disability services to move people from hostels to group houses and, for the better adjusted, to move out into the general community is very welcome, and I look forward to it continuing.

We must not forget that we provide homes for wards of the state. I have asked that steps be taken to ensure that the well-being of these young people is carefully monitored and that they are in the best possible home for each individual. My community welfare area has been directly placing some of these children with foster parents, to ensure that their needs are met as well as possible. I consider this to be a good way to provide homes for some of our more difficult children.

I would like to conclude my discussion today on a more general note. I have tried to set out for members a profile of some of the people we assist and the services available to them. These people have something in common - they need greater or lesser amounts of help to get roofs over their heads. The other more important things that they have in common with other members and me are the rights of equality, to be treated as valued members of our society, to access services and to participate in decision making about themselves. My portfolio tries to achieve this delicate balance, and generally succeeds well.

The Government would not deny that more accommodation options are required in a range of areas and, as I have previously said, we will be working progressively in this area, recognising our priorities of social justice. Today, however, I have concentrated on existing services. My portfolio is delivering a wide range of direct housing services and many types of assistance. My priority in this matter is to ensure that we are delivering these services

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not only effectively and efficiently but also in the best possible interests of our clients.

MR KAINÉ (Leader of the Opposition) (4.03): Mr Speaker, I will be quite brief. I think that the previous speakers have traversed in detail and very well the various aspects of public housing, but not a great deal has been said about private housing. I think a word needs to be said in defence of the private home buyer and the private home financier. I was a bit worried about the terms of reference for this housing policy review. I would have thought that it would have been more appropriate had it been called a public housing policy review, because we are still talking about effective community participation and words of that kind, which are all very good but obviously relate to public housing and not to private housing.

I was concerned about that because I have been through the Labor Party's policy that they campaigned with. Nowhere in Labor's policy is there even one word about private housing, no assistance for private first home buyers, no assistance for any private buyer. It is 110 per cent related to public housing.

We must not lose sight of the fact that by far the greatest preponderance of people out there are private people who borrow privately and build privately. They have nothing to do with welfare housing, nothing to do with public housing, nothing to do with the special needs of some of the special groups that have been discussed here today, and I think we have to keep those people in mind. These are the people who have stood on their own two feet to the best of their ability. They have entered into the notion of every Australian's dream of buying their own home. What is happening is that the dream is developing into a positive nightmare, because they are finding they simply cannot afford to keep up the increasingly high mortgage payments.

This is not a question of a public policy in the sense of public housing. It is a question of public policy in terms of the control and management of the economy. Until such time as our Federal representatives across the lake do something positive to take the heat off the home buyer in the private market and place the burden for our overseas trade balances where it belongs - on the people who are importing the consumption goods and forcing the imbalance in our overseas balances - until the managers of our economy at that level do something to rectify that, the private home buyer in this country will continue to suffer.

In conducting this inquiry I exhort the Minister to set aside for the moment Labor Party policy, which focuses primarily on public housing, and to look in the broader sense at the needs of all home buyers. I refer particularly to private home buyers who at the moment are finding themselves literally going bankrupt. The terms of reference, wide as they are, do not seem to cover that aspect, and I would like an assurance from her that it is intended that that aspect be covered.

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MR MOORE (4.07): Let me first reconfirm what Mr Wood has so ably put about the homeless youth. During the period after the election, before the Assembly finally met and while the vote count was going on, I went back to teaching. I was approached by a number of students at Dickson College who were themselves, or had been themselves at some time, victims as homeless youth. I had long discussions with them about that and also I am very keen to see what sort of provisions we can make, and what we as an Assembly can achieve, for those people. Let us also ensure that it goes further to other forms of crisis housing as well, because they are very important.

To take Mr Kaine's point about new home buyers in particular and refinancing home buyers, we believe that the ACT Housing Trust has a legitimate role to rescue home buyers who, through family breakdowns or sickness, unemployment or other factors, are unable to meet their commitments. However, the Rally views with deep concern the inequitable impact of refinancing approvals derived purely from situations of overborrowing; for example, the easy start home loans which are offered by some banks and building societies and which encourage young people to borrow more than they can afford. A rise in interest rates, which we have witnessed recently, or a drop in family income can threaten their ability to meet rising mortgage repayments. Refinancing such problem cases reduces the funding available to Commissioner for Housing loan applicants who meet normal criteria. It has also enabled these banks and building societies to increase their own interest take without increasing their risk of bad debts.

Recognising that all elements of the real estate industry share the common goal of fulfilling home buyers' dreams, this Government should perhaps seek early talks with the Housing Trust, the Real Estate Institute, the Master Builders Association, the Housing Industry Association and such bodies to investigate means of reducing the burden of interest rates on builders and buyers. The Rally also believes that intending home buyers should be offered independent financial advice, and that perhaps the Housing Trust has a role to organise regular information sessions.

MR SPEAKER: The time for discussion has expired. The discussion is now concluded. I accept Mr Collaery's criticism that timely advice of MPIs must be given to all party leaders, and to this end a method of achieving such timely advice will be implemented immediately.

EXECUTIVE'S OBJECTIVES AND PROGRAM

Ministerial Statement

Debate resumed from 24 May on motion by **Mr Whalan:**

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That the Assembly takes note of the following paper:

Executive's objectives and program -

Ministerial statement, 11 May 1989

MR JENSEN (4.10): Mr Speaker, before commencing my inaugural speech, I would like on behalf of my Rally colleagues to offer our condolences to Mr Whalan on his sad family loss today.

Like many of my colleagues who have already spoken in this debate - and it has taken me a while to get around to it - in reply to the Chief Minister, I would also like to congratulate her on her appointment. I am sure, Mr Speaker, that she will insist quite rightly that her new status as the first woman to lead a State government in Australia was achieved after much hard work - a fact of which the Chief Minister reminded us during our discussions prior to 11 May 1989. For example, we received a specific reminder that one does not rise to the dizzy heights of leader of the Australian Labor Party in the ACT without some ability, a fact that I am also sure will not be lost on our own parliamentary colleagues.

However, Mr Speaker, despite this, I feel it is important to remind the Government that as a minority government, it will have to be on its mettle. I will, however, repeat the public and private assurances given to the Chief Minister by my leader Bernard Collaery that, while the Rally will not be deliberately obstructive, we will seek to implement as many of the Rally policies as we are able to during the term of this Assembly, a responsibility that we owe those who supported the Rally on 4 March. The Government can rest assured that the Rally will continue to build on this strong support base of involved community groups, advisers and individuals and ensure that all sectors of the Canberra community, from the central business district to the frontier suburbs of Tuggeranong, will have an opportunity for a say in how our city is to be governed.

Many of you will no doubt recall that the Rally ran a disciplined campaign and our performance since 4 March has shown that we have been able to maintain these skills and will continue to develop them even further during the months and years ahead. Despite the wishes of some who would hope otherwise, the Rally is here to stay. We may be new to the business of politics, but we are learning very quickly.

I am in no doubt that I speak for my Rally colleagues in this place as well as those of my colleagues who were unsuccessful on 4 March in formally acknowledging the support given to us by those who have allowed the four of us to reach this position of trust and responsibility. The Rally welcomes the opportunity to be able to participate in this historic Assembly. It is important that we as a group of citizens, and I talk collectively, appointed by our peers to manage our city on their behalf ensure that this Assembly runs its full term.

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While it was quite clear during the election campaign that there were people in this Territory who did not want self-government, or people who did not like the way it had been foisted upon them without real consultation, they were also concerned about other decisions that had been forced upon them, like the casino and the voting system. I agree, Mr Speaker, that this sort of unrepresentative decision making and the fear that self-government was going to cost them more were major factors in ensuring that representatives from the No Self Government Party and Abolish Self Government Coalition are also sitting in this Assembly today.

However, a clear majority of residents voted for self-government, so the responsibility is with us all to ensure that we make this new Assembly work. I trust that in due course many of the out-of-town media will return to say that we can govern ourselves after all. The ball, as they say, Mr Speaker, is squarely in our court.

This leads me to comment very briefly on one aspect that the Chief Minister raised in her speech that is dear to the hearts of the Rally and our supporters. It is one of the reasons why many of us became involved in the election, and an issue that I have already alluded to. I am, of course, referring to a commitment to community consultation and participation in the decision making process, a factor that my colleague Mr Collaery also referred to in his remarks in this debate. This was a clear commitment given by the Rally during the campaign, and we intend to make sure that the Government is continually reminded of the commitment by the Chief Minister to this concept. To obtain Rally support for issues where it is appropriate, the Government will have to honour this commitment, and we will be reminding them, Mr Speaker, if they fail.

Many of us in the Rally recall how the NCDC finally sought to improve its image in this area in the final stages of its existence - a death, Mr Speaker, which you will no doubt recall was inflicted by a Federal Minister who had no electoral responsibility to the people of the ACT. I refer to this because this decision resulted in a situation where we now have two - I repeat, two - planning authorities responsible for our city, a predicament that even visiting planning experts as well as our own home grown specialists have found incredible. The Rally will be seeking to ensure, now that we have been forced to live with this travesty, that the National Capital Plan and the Territory Plan are able to coexist as much as possible, and the potential for conflict that has already appeared in some areas is reduced.

I also feel, Mr Speaker, that I should comment briefly on my own feeling on a fact that we have a minority government and a formal opposition. I have no doubt that these comments would have been made regardless of which party had formed a minority government and an opposition. As some of

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you are no doubt aware, it was my wish that the election would have afforded us the chance to provide a lead to the people of Australia in giving a form of government for the ACT that broke away from the combative model that seems to have to exist with a desire for government and opposition.

While I support the concept that a strong opposition is important to democracy within a true Westminster, or "Washminister", system as our federal system in Australia is often called by political scientists, we have here a much smaller parliament than any other legislature in our country. I have no doubt, Mr Speaker, that the electors of Canberra clearly decided on 4 March, with some help from the modified d'Hondt electoral system, that they were prepared to try something new. It was a matter of some concern to me that this opportunity was not taken up to enable a true cooperative system of government with a strong committee system to be put in place. I trust that this will eventually take place, particularly now that the committees have been formed and we have kept the Government, at least in some measure, to its promise on that issue.

We were told by many local and national print and electronic media analysts that this was really not possible. I must report that during the many hours of discussion and negotiation that took place, despite a degree of rhetoric that came from one of the groups, this was really not an option that the two so-called well-established parties were even prepared to contemplate. It would seem that, in the party political system that has slowly entrenched itself in our society's political makeup from the early days of political life in this century, we are not prepared to consider new ideas on government. It is worth noting, Mr Speaker, that in the early days of parliaments in this country the party system did not have the same control over our government as it does today. It was a matter of some regret to me personally that such a small group of parliamentary representatives had to opt for the combative model - a model that many of my contacts out there in voter land find a bit ridiculous. I trust that at some time in the future, maybe after the next election when it is most likely that the pattern of support for independents and parties like the Rally established in the Canberra and the recent Tasmanian election will be continued, this concept can be reconsidered.

In closing, Mr Speaker, I wish to refer briefly to the reason why I am here today. As a resident of Tuggeranong, which incidentally I see as well represented in this chamber, I became involved from the very first public meeting that was called to form the Tuggeranong Community Council. This group was formed to establish the procedure that would enable the residents via their community groups to be represented on advisory groups and participate in the planning process. However, it was after I became chairman of that organisation that I realised that, despite the good efforts of my predecessors, we had found that while some

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officials were happy to consult there were others responsible for other important decisions affecting the community that could not do so. It seemed to be something that they could not come to grips with.

Therefore, Mr Speaker, when I was asked by Mr Collaery to join him in the Rally in seeking to provide a voice for the community groups like those participating in the Tuggeranong Community Council, I agreed to do so willingly - and the rest, as they say, is history.

In these final moments allowed to me in this debate, I feel it is important to recognise my family. Unfortunately, because of changes in arrangements for this Assembly, my wife is unable to be here today, but she was present last week when I was due to give this speech. I would like to say a huge thankyou to my wife Wendy and my children, who supported my decision to run for this Assembly. This was despite periods during the campaign and that long period before we finally took up our seats in this place which, as I am sure many of you here today will attest, were was not easy.

I look forward, Mr Speaker, to the challenge ahead. The Rally will be doing its best to ensure that this Assembly provides responsive, open and thrifty government that is in the best interests of our fellow citizens of this great city in which we live.

Mr Humphries: Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I wrote to you last week or the week before about the nature of these what I call maiden speeches and what others would call inaugural speeches. I note that you advised me by letter that you would treat these speeches in reply to the Chief Minister's statement on the Executive's objectives as maiden speeches. I note that during the speech by Mr Jensen a number of interjections occurred. I would ask you to ask members of the chamber not to interject during maiden speeches and to uphold a tradition which goes back many decades, if not centuries, regarding the making of maiden speeches.

MR SPEAKER: Yes, Mr Humphries, I do accept your point of order.

MR STEVENSON (4.21): Mr Speaker, fellow members, ladies and gentlemen, we have witnessed something that few people see in their entire lives: the birth of a government. Normally, when such a matter was proposed, it would lead to great pride in the people and indeed celebration. First, it would have involved citizens in much consultation and decision, certainly in the type of government that was to be formed and the number of members that would represent them in the electoral system and perhaps most importantly in the constitution of that government.

It was unfortunate that Canberrans were not allowed this opportunity, and we understand why that was. It was well-

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known that Canberrans did not want what was termed self-government. My involvement came after self-government was called. I thought that was not particularly a democratic process and I had heard a report from the Queensland electorate of Barambah that a number of citizens who felt that perhaps they were not getting the representation they wanted would select their own candidate. They did so, and he was actually elected with a 38 per cent swing against the sitting government.

It was some short while after that that the ACT Citizens Electoral Council was formed with a view to electing members who would represent the constituents. Some two or three weeks after that time, in discussions with a barrister who had a marvellous understanding of constitutional law, it became my understanding that the Constitution would not allow self-government to be called for the nation's capital, and at that time I and others determined to form the Abolish Self Government Coalition party.

I think most of the rest of it is history. Some 22 per cent of people registered a vote against self-government. We had over 10,000 votes personally. I think it fair to say that I was elected to do my utmost to abolish self-government. I must say that if there was a motion toward the Assembly today to do so I indeed would vote to abolish it. You can imagine my delight last week when Mr Whalan indicated that the preschool fee was going to be abolished. I thought, "Could this be two in a row?", but perhaps not.

Let us look at the fact of citizens being involved in the governmental process. During the last 100 years there has been a practical method evolved throughout the world that allows citizens a far greater involvement in the legislative process. That method is termed "voters veto". What the veto does is allow the citizens the freedom to veto proposed legislation or repeal existing legislation. If, say, 5,000 people in Canberra signed a petition and presented that to the Assembly, that would compel the Government to put that matter to referendum, perhaps on one day per year set aside for that. The result in a simple majority would then be binding on the Government.

This particular form of democratic process has quite a range of benefits, not the least being benefits to the Government. I think we are all aware that from time to time governments claim a mandate for some particular policy. We are equally aware that at times it seems evident that people do not feel they have that mandate. What the veto would allow is the citizens to have a say specifically on the point they are concerned about through the veto, when they would not have to go to the more severe method of kicking out the Government at the next election. It would be a rather mild way of letting the Government know that in that particular instance it had not read the mind of the electorate correctly.

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It should be said that the veto is certainly not a substitute for government. It works successfully in Switzerland, Italy and 24 States and the District of Columbia in the United States; and during that time perhaps on average there would be two items per year that people really felt strongly enough about that were put to the veto - not many at all. I should also mention that the veto in Canberra certainly could not be used to abolish self-government, self-government legislation of course being federal, and the veto here would simply be for the ACT.

Different forms of citizens' referenda have been used in other countries throughout the world - Denmark, Austria, Canada - and there has been no situation where once the people have had such a power introduced they have ever wanted to relinquish it. People do not want to run government; they just want an occasional say on those things they feel strongly about. When we look at the democratic principles, indeed Australia has been a world leader. We were a pioneer behind New York and New Zealand in introducing the vote for women. We were also the first country in the world that introduced the secret ballot.

The Labor Party in its own right had the principle of citizens' referenda as a major platform plank since its inception in the 1890s. Indeed, in 1908 the Federal Labor Party introduced a citizens' initiative as part of its platform. In 1915 the Queensland Labor Party Government at that time introduced a Bill that included the veto as well as the initiative, the initiative being the ability to introduce legislation and constitutional change. At that time the opposition in Queensland in the upper house disallowed the legislation and it did not go through, although Labor persisted for four more years when it attempted to introduce that legislation three more times. Labor had that principle in its platform right up to 1963 when, at the instigation of Don Dunstan, it was removed.

The Liberal Party in its own right, prior to the 1987 federal election, also had as a policy citizens' referenda. The Democrats have been committed to citizens having the opportunity to introduce things by way of referenda for well over a decade. I feel it would indeed be a proud moment and a proud situation for this Government and the people of Canberra if the ACT were the first area in Australia that introduced the democratic principle of citizens' referenda.

MRS NOLAN (4.30): I rise today in response to the opening address by the Chief Minister, and would also like to echo Mr Humphries' statement of last week and thank you, Mr Speaker, for allowing the making of formal maiden speeches. While that all seems so long ago now, I think it is important that that tradition still remain. The tradition surrounding the making of maiden speeches by new members of parliament does, as has already been mentioned, go back a century and more. We as members of the first ACT

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Legislative Assembly are making history as this Assembly gets down to its first weeks of sittings.

I would also like to extend my congratulations to the Chief Minister on her election, but I would also like to point out, Mr Speaker, that we women are here today on merit, I am sure, and not on gender representation. The make-up of this Assembly is somewhat unusual, and I feel it is absolutely vital that I and others remind the people of the ACT that the Northern Territory has now had self-government for 10 years and the economic and social development which has resulted from Territorians making decisions for Territorians is a matter of record.

I believe that it is the responsibility of all of us in this chamber to provide stable and responsible government, and I believe that the ACT's potential is limited only by the vision of its people. The ACT enjoys many advantages and I am very proud as a resident of 10 years to be part of the history-making process of self-government and to live in a city that does have advantages which place it in a unique position to grow and expand.

It is true that it is the centre of political life in Australia - however, until now, with much less political representation than the rest of Australia. It is the home of many of our national institutions; it has a strategic location in the Sydney-Melbourne corridor; and its people, its major resource, are the highest qualified in Australia. It also happens to have an internationally acclaimed environment, and while it is the envy of many we must take care that this continues to be the case.

Obviously there are concerns in the community about what self-government will bring. People are concerned about cost; they are concerned about employment prospects for their children; and as a mother of two school-age children I share their concerns. People fear that schools and hospital standards will drop. However, as locally elected representatives we all share those same concerns. We, too, are Canberrans.

The Liberal Party has underpinned those basic principles that set the direction for our policies. It is these principles which differentiate us from the corporalist and centralist ideas of the Labor Party, and it is these principles that set the direction of our policies.

The objective of our principles is to support and place emphasis on the family, which is the cornerstone of our society; promote freedom of choice and individual responsibility; provide incentive for people to work; encourage greater efficiency; reduce government regulation and allow businesses and individuals to get on with the job; improve competition and flexibility in the local economy; attract new industry and create new jobs in our community; strive for excellence in all spheres; and emphasise equality of opportunity.

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Mr Speaker, I would like at this time to take a few moments to mention in particular the tourism industry. While the tourism industry in the ACT is one of our major growth industries we have, unlike the rest of Australia, failed to fully benefit from the increases in tourism which have occurred at a national level. Although the tourism industry has grown significantly in Canberra, much of the tourist potential remains untapped. Better and more promotion of the ACT, both domestically and internationally, together with improved transport facilities and tourism infrastructure is required. The tourism industry is in a special position to provide jobs and capital development and help free the Territory from reliance on the public sector.

I am also very pleased to offer the Tuggeranong Valley local representation. Very often the outer suburban areas can sometimes be forgotten. May I assure the residents of the valley that it will not be the case in this Assembly. In fact, as was already mentioned earlier, I am not the only valley resident.

The valley has in recent times suffered as a result of the decisions of our Federal Labor representatives. Now that two members from this Assembly live in the valley, a better understanding of the priorities will enable better decisions to be taken. That is not to say I do not share the same concerns for the remainder of Canberra. I do. New developments should be encouraged and welcomed when they are in keeping with our unique city landscape or when they complement our natural environment.

It is my belief, and the view of the Liberal Party, that the family is the fundamental unit of society. It provides a positive environment in which with its mixture of caring and authority, its view of the individual as a uniquely important person is a setting in which self-reliant and responsible individuals can develop and their virtues of tolerance and cooperation in the achievement of shared goals can be demonstrated. Maybe we in this Assembly should continue to remind ourselves that we are a family.

Finally, I too have many people to thank for their contribution in making me a member of the first Legislative Assembly. I am sure that, if I name them, there are some that I will forget. However, I would like to recognise the huge contribution my husband Leon and two children Richard and Jade made. I place on record a special thankyou to all those other very special people who have given me their time so generously and support both through the campaign and in the months following that campaign.

Once again I thank you, Mr Speaker, for allowing time for all of us to respond to the Chief Minister's address.

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Stefaniak): I call Mr Prowse.

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MR PROWSE (4.37): Mr Deputy Speaker, this is indeed an historic event in more ways than one. Obviously, the first Legislative Assembly for the ACT, resulting from the decision of the Federal Parliament that the people of the ACT must become self-governing, has stirred the people of the ACT to polarise into those for, and those opposed to, self-government.

Some had vested interests in the status quo. Others had vested interests in self-government. However, in the main, the majority of people took their stance based on what they considered to be the best interests of the city-state we all love. I was voted into this Assembly by people opposed to self-government. Obviously, all of these were defectors from established parties - myself included. I must add that I have always been a swinging voter who has voted on the issues as I have seen them.

People are opposed to this Assembly for the following reasons: resistance to change and fear of the unknown; a belief that state-style responsibilities for such things as health and education cannot be economically managed by our small population, and therefore municipal-style government is more appropriate to the ACT; belief that this Assembly will be filled by politicians who become non-responsive to the wishes of the public except for the period immediately before an election; and last, but by no means least, good people of all political persuasions are incensed by the dictatorial attitude of the Federal politicians who, despite a referendum to the contrary, are on record as saying that the people of the ACT will have self-government whether they want it or not.

Mr Deputy Speaker, these issues are very real and ongoing. Although opposed to self-government for some of the reasons listed above, I am for good government, and I applaud my fellow members of the Assembly because I have now come to realise that we are all like-minded on this issue. Therefore, in realisation of the fact that on 4 March the voters of Canberra did not give the No Self Government Party a majority vote such as would have enabled us to demand repeal of the ACT (Self-Government) Act by the Federal Parliament, we of the NSG will seek the indulgence of the Assembly to hold an inquiry into the form of self-government best suited to the ACT. This inquiry would be open to submissions from the public and, upon the report of the committee, such action as recommended in the report would be implemented forthwith.

I do not see this as demeaning of the good and honest efforts of my fellow Assembly members. What I do see is that this inquiry will induce us all to go back to the doubting members of the public, present our case, and thereby educate the people of Canberra as to the worth of self-government.

I look forward to the possibility that the recommendation from the inquiry will be that a referendum of the people of

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the ACT be held on the question of what form of self-government the people desire, thereby partially righting the wrong of our Federal politicians. Let us clear the air. Let us heal this division within our community which, up until now, has presented an example for all, as one of the most homogeneous communities within Australia.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I now speak to the overwhelming concern we all have for our environment. Another wrong that I request our new Government, via the Minister for Housing and Urban Services, Mrs Grassby, to redress immediately is that of compulsory mass medication of the population by the addition of a chemical to our water supply: fluoride.

Fluoride is a highly toxic, cumulative poison that is causing untold misery and distress to many of our citizens, particularly our senior citizens. The World Health Organisation has reported that studies show 1 per cent of a population that drinks artificially fluoridated water at the rate of one part per million will be adversely affected to the degree that they will seek medical attention or will be hospitalised. This is the situation in the ACT and is to be vehemently deplored. Fifteen countries, six of them European, have now, after many years of artificial fluoridation of their water supplies, ceased this mad act of pollution because the dental benefits did not result from fluoridation, but ill health caused by fluoride poisoning did result.

I might add that, although fluoridation of water supplies in Victoria is compulsory, several large Victorian cities, Geelong included, have not had their water contaminated by this mad act of pollution because the unions have banned the commissioning of already constructed fluoridation plants. The unionists recognise that compulsory, mass medication is a dictatorial act and is therefore abhorrent to the Australian way of life.

I therefore request the Minister to immediately instruct her staff who control the fluoridation plants in the ACT to switch them off - and never to switch them on again without first obtaining a result of a referendum of the people on this matter.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I opened my address by saying that this is indeed an historic occasion in more ways than one and, therefore, to pursue that line of thought, history has been made in that I have been elected by my fellow Assembly members to the position of Speaker. I must convey my overwhelming gratitude to you all for this vote of confidence in me, and I can assure you of my desire to uphold this high office to the best of my ability and with decorum.

The fact that I have come to this Assembly on a no self-government vote will be consciously put aside while I am fulfilling the role of Speaker, and I thereby assure you all that my position will always be apolitical. However,

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as a member of the NSG Party, I will be obliged to vote on all issues before the Assembly. As you are aware, this is an unusual circumstance, as in most other parliaments the Speaker only renders a casting vote. You can all see the dilemma in which I may be placed during an active debate on the floor of the Assembly. However, as I said earlier, I assure you of my best intentions at all times.

To go back to history, Dr Kinloch has suggested that I may follow in Sam Rayburn's footsteps. I did not have this at my fingertips. I had to look it up, I must admit. From 1882 to 1961 Sam Rayburn was a Texan Democrat, the longest serving Speaker in American history. He spent 17 years as Speaker and a total time of over 48 years as a representative of his country. He was temperamentally conservative, he was respected for his honesty and sincerity, and he worked to bring about compromise between factions. So I thank Dr Kinloch for his vote of confidence.

Mr Deputy Speaker, the Speaker is usually selected on the basis of the length of good and honest service to the parliament. He is the respected, indeed revered, elder statesman, the father of the house. I certainly do not see myself as Dr Kinloch's father in real age but, if the activity of the last few days is any guide, I may well look the part in a very short space of time. Nevertheless, my intention is to earn the respect that this position of authority has bestowed upon me. I thank you all for your indulgence, and I conclude by wishing you good health, cheer and noteworthy, amicable deliberations both on the floor of the Assembly and outside this chamber.

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr Prowse. It is a pity to give you your chair back so soon. I could get used to it.

MR WHALAN (Minister for Industry, Employment and Education) (4.45): In this first formal address to the Assembly it is proper for me to acknowledge the responsibility I now share with the Chief Minister and my ministerial colleagues for the good government of the ACT. In fulfilling the trust of the ACT community, I strongly reiterate the Chief Minister's statement that "the principles of the Government are to develop a community based on social justice and economic security".

These principles are central to the portfolio responsibilities I carry in this first Follett Government. Thus, the provision of quality education is critical not only to the personal development of our young people but also to the upgrading of vocational skills in our work force. The importance of this complementary relationship is clearly apparent for youth and women.

The ALP Government is firmly committed to maintaining the high proportion of our young men and women who complete secondary school. We will also be actively working to improve the links between secondary colleges and TAFE so

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that school leavers are better prepared for the world of work. For those young people who suffer lengthy periods of unemployment we will be developing assistance schemes that build their skills and self-confidence to enable them to regain jobs.

The link between social justice and economic security is also important for women in the ACT community. While the last decade has seen significant growth in the proportion of women in the ACT work force, their access to different types of jobs has been neither equitable nor consistent with the economic well-being of the ACT.

I emphasise these direct links between social justice and economic security for we are now entering a challenging period. We will need all our energy and enterprise if we are to sustain, much less improve, our current standard of living in the ACT community.

We have just enjoyed four years of rapid and sustained economic growth in the ACT. In the last year, however, the momentum has faded. ACT employment is now growing more slowly than the national average. The slowdown reflects the fact that there is no growth in Commonwealth public service employment. It reflects reductions from a peak in Commonwealth capital works expenditure following completion of Parliament House, and a consequential reduction in consumer spending.

Over the next year, 1989-90, population and employment growth are foreshadowed to be at less than 2 per cent per annum. This slowdown comes at a time when there are record numbers of young adults looking to move into the labour market.

In the circumstances, the Chief Minister's success in retaining the Commonwealth Government's budgetary commitments to the ACT provides the necessary firm base for the development and pursuit of the Government's economic strategy.

While the Government will work to encourage the Commonwealth Government to maintain its contribution to the ACT economy, our economic and social future relies substantially on the private sector. Private enterprise will be critical to investment growth and the job prospects of these new labour market entrants, and thus to ensuring unemployment remains below the national average. If we are to achieve private sector investments in the ACT's future we will need a clear strategy, a supportive environment and the complementary action elsewhere in the ACT public sector.

Work is now proceeding on a strategic approach to ACT economic development. This strategy will identify components of the private sector which offer the greatest opportunity for growth, particularly in terms of new jobs. This growth will need to reflect our market advantages in a

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national and international context and identify opportunities for export and import replacement.

The Chief Minister in her address has indicated that we will improve the business climate in the ACT. Such an economic strategy will guide a program of action to achieve our social justice and economic security objectives. Some essential preparatory action has already been foreshadowed.

The Canberra Development Board is to be restructured to provide advice on strategic matters to the Government. The Tourist Bureau is being reviewed, but will in future work more directly to me as the responsible Minister. An industry policy and strategy area is being established in my department to coordinate and focus on industry policy issues.

As indicated by the Chief Minister in her address, the Government will be providing an extra \$0.5m for industry assistance and development. The ACT has a highly educated and skilled work force and we need to maintain and enhance our position. Thus, as a matter of highest priority we will work to ensure that the ACT Institute of TAFE is closely involved in the implementation of our development policies. For example, the industry division of my department and the TAFE are now investigating the potential application of "quick start" recruitment and training assistance to train the work force of industries attracted to the ACT.

Given the potential significance of the VFT to the Canberra and region economy, a VFT coordination group has been established within the department. Work has also commenced on investigating the potential for an international air facility in the south-eastern region.

A number of economic sectors have been targeted for special investigation to exploit the education and skill base of the ACT. These include tourism and advanced technology industries; important replacement activities, notably the printing and allied industries; defence, finance and business services; and commercial potentials for developing the strengths of the ACT education, health and research infrastructure.

I will also be reviewing the Government's capital works program and construction policies to ensure these contribute more effectively to our economic objectives. I have in mind action to a more balanced annual workload for the local consultant and construction industries. There is also scope for achieving a more economical balance between capital and maintenance expenditure, and improving our management and maintenance of government assets.

This Government, like other State and Federal governments, clearly sees a need for education to make a major contribution to our economic well-being. The ACT public school system has been leading the way in this regard by

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taking advantage of our very high retention rates to expand student pathways into tertiary education and to provide direct preparation for employment.

The Government's primary intention, then, is to build on the strengths of a good education system. We will achieve this by enhancing the linkages that already exist across the levels of schooling, from preschools to secondary colleges; for example, through the provision of educational services on a regional basis and through curriculum networks between colleges, their feeder high and primary schools, and by developing greater coherence within the levels of schooling.

The ACT is already participating in a national curriculum mapping exercise in mathematics, and curriculum frameworks are presently being prepared in the ACT for use in our public schools. We are seeking opportunities for schools to assume an even greater responsibility for their own management within a framework of centrally provided support. We are strengthening the linkages between the schooling sector and TAFE as a way of ensuring that all students have the opportunity of reaching their fullest potential.

In the interests of excellence in education, the Government will further develop a means of monitoring the activity and performance of schools. Thus, the ACT has accepted, with other States, a set of national goals for schooling developed under the auspices of the Australian Education Council.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

ADJOURNMENT

Use of Old Parliament House

Motion (by **Mr Whalan**) proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

MR HUMPHRIES (4.53): I note that the decision has been taken today by the Federal Government on the use of the old Parliament House and that it is to be used as a museum of constitutional history. I applaud that particular aspect of the Federal Government's decision. I also note that it is to be used as the home for certain organisations, and the Chief Minister mentioned one such organisation, namely, the National Trust.

Ms Follett: No; the Heritage Commission.

MR HUMPHRIES: The Heritage Commission; I am sorry. In my view, that is not inappropriate either. I note the comments of the Chief Minister that she believes that the

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old Parliament House would, however, be an inappropriate home for this ACT Assembly. I have to say that personally - and I speak personally in this speech - I regret that approach. My apprehension was heightened somewhat by the reasons the Chief Minister gave for not believing that the old Parliament House would be a suitable location for this Assembly. She said that the building was too large. Of course it is too large. I need hardly point out to the Government that this building is also too large for the ACT Assembly. We occupy less than half of the floor space in this building. The answer, both in this building and in the old Parliament House, should that be possible, would be to use only part of the building, and the museum of constitutional history could still more than amply be accommodated in that building, as well as ourselves.

Mr Kaine: We could be part of the museum.

MR HUMPHRIES: We could indeed, as my learned leader says, be part of the museum. What better and more apt connection between a living parliament and a museum of constitutional history. The Chief Minister said that the cost is prohibitive. The cost is an excellent criterion, and I support that - which is why I believe that we should move to the old Parliament House. The Chief Minister is well aware that the cost of hiring this building is \$670 a square metre.

Ms Follett: That is wrong.

MR HUMPHRIES: I am sure that, whatever the figure is, it is much, much higher than whatever this Assembly would be paying if it were to move into the old Parliament House. I have not received a reply from the Chief Minister to my letter, so I do not know whether the option has been explored and whether the Federal Government has been approached to ask it what the cost of hiring would be. I look forward to the Chief Minister's advice on that question if it is obtained.

The Chief Minister eventually said that the use of the old Parliament House would not be appropriate. That, I think, is not only the nub of the Government's reasons, but also the only reason that I can see for denying that suggestion. To suggest that a national monument ought not to be used to house an ACT institution I think belittles the connection between the establishment of those national buildings and the history of the Canberra community.

Canberra owes its very existence to the existence of such national institutions. To boil it down to its very simplest terms, our presence here on these Limestone Plains is indeed directly related to the creation 62 years ago, only a few kilometres from this site, of a white building on the slopes of Camp Hill. No other community in the world, Mr Speaker, so owes its existence, its very presence here, to the existence of a single building as does Canberra.

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Although the old Parliament House is significant for all Australians, it is of infinitely more significance to the people of the ACT. For anyone to suggest that it is inappropriate for us to be housed in that building across the lake, a building of such enormous significance to the ACT and to its history, is, I think, an insult to Canberra's history itself.

To cordon off the parliamentary triangle and to assume that it cannot be used for any Canberra-related purposes, I think, is to treat it like a sort of Vatican City in the middle of the ACT, which would be wholly inappropriate. There are many other reasons, which I do not have time to go through, Mr Speaker, as to why that building would be an appropriate place. It is much more accessible than this building in terms of parking and things of that kind; it has more space, a commodity we desperately need; and, moreover, it puts distance between the public servants and the politicians - also a very healthy thing.

I would ask the Government to explore that idea, or at least to keep the option open as far as the Federal Government is concerned. It should at least ask the Federal Government what the consequences of such a move would be, and advise the Assembly at some later stage of the results of those inquiries.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Assembly adjourned at 4.59 pm