



DEBATES

OF THE

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

FOR THE

AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

HANSARD

1 November 1989

Wednesday, 1 November 1989

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MR SPEAKER (Mr Prowse) took the chair at 10.30 am and read the prayer.

**PLANNING, DEVELOPMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE - STANDING COMMITTEE
Report**

MR COLLAERY (10.30): Mr Speaker, I present the report of the standing committee on the redevelopment of the former Canberra Times site, together with copies of the minutes of the proceedings of the committee. I move:

That the report be noted.

This is the second report of the Standing Committee on Planning, Development and Infrastructure. I would like to start by thanking my colleagues on the committee, Mr Kaine, Mr Duby and Mr Wood, but special thanks should go to the secretary to the committee, Mr John Cummins, who attended to the vast organisational aspects of this study, along with his multifarious other functions, with promptitude, accuracy and good humour. Much of the report and the substance of the input is due to Mr Cummins' capacity to deal with third parties in an effective manner to ensure that full cooperation, which all the many witnesses gave the committee, is secured. On that point, I would also like to thank, on behalf of the committee, all those witnesses who presented oral and/or written evidence to the committee, at times at short notice. Of course, not least, I should thank the clerical and keyboard staff, Miss Stirling and Mrs Blackburn, who have attended to this drafting effort, once again under pressure and with accuracy.

Mr Speaker, the report was finalised only in recent hours, and it covers both references received from the Assembly; namely, the redevelopment of the Canberra Times site, and the effects of the Supreme Court's decision on other developments. Two extensions of reporting time were sought. The first extension was sought because it was just not possible to produce the report in the time available, and the second extension was to enable fuller consultation with the community and planning authorities and also to enable the committee to consider various legal opinions, some of which we received in camera.

Some of the opponents to the proposal who were parties to the original Supreme Court action were approached, but those litigants declined to appear because of the Federal Court appeal. They did, in fact, provide submissions in

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one written form or another. All the committee's recommendations and conclusions relating to the redevelopment of the Canberra Times site are subject to the qualification that they are in accordance with the policies enunciated and which bind planning in the ACT. Both the Interim Territory Planning Authority and the National Capital Planning Authority believe that the Civic and metropolitan plans, which were crucial to these considerations of the committee, may validly coexist. Legal advice to the Government indicates that, in the event of any conflicts, the Canberra Civic plan prevails to the extent to which it provides more specific policy directives.

The committee's view is that, on the basis of evidence presented to it, the redevelopment of the Canberra Times site would not be inconsistent with either plan. However, I personally am of the view that the development is inconsistent with the 1984 metropolitan policy plan and may be inconsistent with the 1989 Civic Canberra plan to the extent to which the proposed development is of a scale unrelated to likely post-construction private sector accommodation requirements. However, the committee itself considers that likely impacts on traffic, parking and pollution levels must be assessed and that that assessment should be subject to public comment.

Irrespective of any government decision relating to this redevelopment, parking restrictions should be introduced for residential streets close to Civic. The committee notes recent announcements by the Government but has not had the opportunity to discuss those, of course. The committee considers that the course of action the Government should adopt is to surrender and regrant the lease, but only if a proper assessment indicates that the development is in accordance with the policy plans and only if the impact will be minimal. However, I personally disagree with the term "minimal" and emphasise that policy directives cannot be diluted. Also, the committee's view is conditional on the Government actively discouraging public sector occupation of the building. This is a view which I personally believe is essential and mandatory on the Government, and I draw to the attention of the house my further comments, some by way of dissent, at appendix 3 of the report. Overall, the report dealt with the very important issues facing the community. They include, of course, a balance between claims of urban degradation and the business and proprietary interests behind the development.

The committee has had extensive input from various sectors and comprehensive submissions from the proposed developer and the developer's consultants and advisers. The community was not far behind the proponents of the development in giving detailed advice to the committee in relation to the concerns, particularly those of the inner city residents. The issues raised by the inner city residents are principally met by the committee's report, and I have made some additional comments on them too.

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I do not propose to take my full speaking time because the report will speak for itself. Given the fact that I have made some additional comments in the report, I feel that the report should stand as a committee document. I conclude by saying, as chairman, that this was a difficult study for me. I deplored at one stage personal attempts to influence me and, in particular, personal approaches to me by one or two parties who sought to put more direct influence on me in my deliberations on this committee. Regrettably, those parties were not the proponents of the development. They were alternative parties who sought, ironically, at a time when I was in fact arguing for their interests, to suborn my activities on this committee and put undue, unnecessary and improper pressure upon me. Of course I rejected those approaches, and I think the public record speaks for itself.

MR KAINE (Leader of the Opposition) (10.39): Despite the kind of pressure that the chairman has referred to - and I must say that all members of the committee have been, to some degree, subjected to the kind of pressure that he refers to, perhaps not in such a personal and direct way - the significance of this report is so great that clearly there were a lot of people, a lot of interests, who felt that their view should be heard, and that view was not always expressed through the medium of the committee hearings. So I think the report is a significant one, and I think that the solution that it recommends ought to be an acceptable one.

This matter has clearly been one of some concern to every member of this Assembly. I referred this matter to the committee in the first place because I thought that it required an in-depth discussion and debate - perhaps in greater depth than could have been pursued on the floor of the house. Of course, we had to make sure that anybody that had an interest was given an opportunity, and plenty of time, to make his or her view known, and I believe that the committee process has allowed that to occur.

The big dilemma, of course, is that it is very difficult for this legislature to appear to be setting aside a ruling of the Supreme Court of the ACT. It is a question of just what relevance and what importance that ruling has and whether or not we are pitting ourselves against the judiciary in this matter. I would hope that the court does not see it in that light. It certainly is not, in my view, our intention. It was a case of that ruling having to be reviewed because of the significance and the importance of that ruling for the future well-being - economic well-being in particular - of the ACT. That is not to say that we can set aside the environmental and the social matters that emerge from the problem. But it gave us a dilemma as to just how far we as a committee should go in recommending to this Assembly a course of action. Of course, the dilemma now resides with the members of this Assembly because ultimately it has to be the decision of this Assembly as a

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whole as to whether the recommendations are accepted or not.

The committee had to examine a number of matters. First of all we looked at the matters which we understood Mr Justice Kelly took into account in arriving at his decision, matters such as the growth in employment levels in the Civic centre. It seemed to us that the evidence that was presented to Mr Justice Kelly on the present status of the work force in Civic was an overstatement of the situation; that, in fact, the judge could have been led into making his ruling on the basis of incorrect evidence to the effect that somehow or other we had reached the ceiling in the Civic centre in terms of the permissible total number of employees according to the intent of the metropolitan plan and the Civic plan. We had to assess that evidence to determine what the true situation was in terms of the current level of employment in the Civic centre. We found that the level of employment is not nearly as great as was represented to Mr Justice Kelly, as we understand the evidence that was presented to him. So that immediately raised the question of whether Mr Justice Kelly was perhaps misled in the evidence that was given to him and on which he based his ruling.

We looked at things like traffic and parking, just what effect this project would have on the traffic flows and the parking problem in the Civic centre. We concluded, Mr Speaker, that the effects of this project in isolation would be minimal. It is reasonable to say that there ought to be a limit to the level of the employment force within the Civic centre, that there ought to be a limit to the traffic flow, and that there ought to be a limit to how many cars need to be parked. But to say that this project in isolation is the straw that has broken the planning back of the Civic centre, I submit, is going too far. What is required, of course, is a long-term plan for Civic that sets projects of this nature into some sort of a context. What we are doing at the moment is trying to set it in the context of a plan that was drawn up in 1973 or 1974 or something like that, a plan that one could argue perhaps is no longer relevant, given the changes that have occurred in Canberra - in the work force, in the population, in the commercial growth, and in public service employment - in that time.

Of course, we had to look at the relevance of the metropolitan and the Civic plans to see whether indeed they were still relevant. I think, generally speaking, the committee concludes that what is needed now is a revised plan. It is no good looking at what was determined in 1973 as being a fair and reasonable thing. That plan needs to be updated, and of course the Chief Minister has taken some initiatives towards that with the publication of a discussion paper. Some of us would say that it is too little too late but, in fairness, the Chief Minister has initiated action to have the plan updated. I think it is important that that be done, and that it be done as quickly as possible.

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Another aspect of this project was whether or not there was anything unique about it that would justify recommending a different course of action from that which the judge came to in his decision. There is some argument to suggest that there is a uniqueness about it. This uniqueness stems from the fact that the company in question has engaged in a lot of work of a developmental nature in Canberra over many years. In almost every case, in every project that it has undertaken, it had to have a lease purpose change. In no prior case was it refused. When it bought this lease there was every expectation that this project was just another project of the same kind and nature as those that it had been engaged in for many years in the Territory. So there was a reasonable expectation on its part that there would be no objection to its going ahead on this particular development.

So we believe there were reasons which justify the committee recommending to the Assembly that we pursue a specific course of action and, in simple terms, that course of action is to have the existing lease surrendered and to issue another one. The committee chairman, Mr Collaery, has pointed out that we believe there ought to be some constraints on that. I think there is the question of whether or not the Civic centre is going to be filled up to its ceiling of employees with public servants. Should it not become the commercial centre for the city of Canberra? And, if there is a ceiling on how many people can be employed here, does that not then require that the public servants be accommodated somewhere else and that Civic be left free to expand as a commercial centre? I think, on that basis, the committee chairman has recommended that something positive be done to make sure that this particular building is not filled up with public servants as soon as it is available - not that we have anything in particular against public servants but, if it is the intention that Civic become the commercial centre of Canberra, we have got to make space available for that to occur.

Mr Speaker, there were real problems. I do not say that the committee report has completed the debate on a lot of those issues. We attempted to evaluate them and to recommend a course of action to the Assembly, to the Chief Minister and to the Minister for Industry, Employment and Education as to which direction they should go to resolve this problem in the longer-term interests of the Territory. We believe our recommendation is the right one. We know there will be some aspects of it that are controversial and that the debate perhaps has not finished yet, but I think we have made a reasonable recommendation which the Government can entertain and get on with quickly to resolve the matter.

MR WOOD (10.48): Mr Speaker, the first aspect that the committee had to consider was whether it should consider the matter at all. In this regard I take a stronger view

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than Mr Kaine, perhaps a more confident view, that this parliament is the supreme legislative body in this Territory on Territory matters and has the right to consider such matters. There was unquestionably no sub judice consideration involved, and it is no offence to the court to consider, to report and to act on this question. I am sure the court would agree with that. Having decided that we should consider the matter, what did we then decide? Well, you have the report. You have heard the chairman's overall view of it. The remarks he has made are quite correct, of course. Basically the committee has decided that the building should go ahead and that it should be done by means of a surrender of the existing lease and the regrant of another lease. That is the way to do it. Certain conditions were attached; namely, to accommodate a variety of views expressed in the community which were quite legitimate and ought to be considered.

The proposal also accommodates a rather confused planning arrangement. There are a number of plans and there is some doubt as to which plan or which part of which plan has precedence over another. There are overlapping provisions. There are different relationships between plans. In that confused circumstance, the committee, I think, has trodden an effective path through it all to come up with these recommendations. It is also, I believe, the view of the committee - though these words have not been specifically used - that this ought to proceed with rapidity. There has been enough delay on this matter and it ought to go ahead without any further delay. The final point I wish to make on that matter is that this case should not be seen as setting any precedent. There are unique circumstances around it and it is not to be taken as opening up the gate for any other similar approach from other sources.

Having said that, I am not going to talk particularly about the report, but I will make a fairly general comment about planning in Civic. For a long time it has been agreed that Civic is not much of a commercial, entertainment and cultural centre for Canberra. I have the view that taking all public servants out of their Civic offices and putting non-public sector people in would not change that one bit. It will still be the same place. I think the planners have given us a place that is nowhere near as lively as it ought to be, and that is primarily because of the range of activities that are presently allowed to occur in Civic. We could go on as we are, removing public servants out of the place, and we would still have basically not much more than limited retail, food and entertainment provisions in the Civic area. The range of commercial activity that goes on is far too limited. It is simply not broad or interesting enough. I have views, which I will express in later debates, on the way that we can diversify what happens in Civic. Only then will it be a more interesting place to be in.

We could take the public servants out of the ground floor of all these buildings, but we do not make it any more

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interesting by putting private sector people in. We compare public with private, but they are still people and this does not change very much what happens. There is a great deal more to be done in the planning to make Civic the place that we all want it to be.

MR DUBY (10.53): My committee colleagues have gone through the broad thrust of the recommendations and the discussions and deliberations that the committee undertook in relation to this issue. As Mr Collaery said, we received a number of submissions. I just did a little adding up. We received 17 submissions and we interviewed at length 22 witnesses in relation to the Canberra Times site proposal. I think the committee's recommendations have addressed all issues that were put before the committee in its deliberations.

There is no doubt in my mind that the committee's recommendation still complies with the 1989 Civic centre plan, particularly in relation to employment levels. Mr Kaine mentioned that we particularly examined employment levels within Civic. If this proposal goes ahead, the percentage of the population working in Civic will still be less than 20 per cent of that of the ACT. We have examined traffic and parking issues and environmental issues as well, and those issues have been addressed in the recommendations that the committee has come up with.

I particularly hope that the Government can place restrictions on inner city parking. I know that it has addressed an issue with its transit plan which was tabled last week. In a way, I think it stole our thunder a little bit, because we had recommended that certain measures be taken in that regard. At least it is the first step along the way.

Nevertheless, another important issue that has come out of our committee's discussion is the recommendation in relation to unleaded country grade and city grade petrol. To my knowledge, this is the first time this has been raised in the Assembly as a recommendation of any kind, and I think people will look forward to the Government implementing what to me are eminently sensible suggestions that we have low-lead petrol here in the ACT. Nevertheless, that is a matter for the Government to investigate and report on.

I think I agree with Mr Wood - and this point should be stressed - that the recommendations of this committee should not be seen as a blank cheque for development within the Civic area. The Concrete Constructions site, or the Canberra Times site, has to be identified as a one-off special case for a variety of special circumstances which Mr Kaine outlined. Therefore, I am happy to concur with the report that has been put down and to heartily support, or at least endorse, the recommendation of the committee that the lease be surrendered and regranted.

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Debate (on motion by **Ms Follett**) adjourned.

CONSERVATION, HERITAGE AND ENVIRONMENT - STANDING COMMITTEE Report

MR HUMPHRIES (10.56): Mr Speaker, I present the report of the inquiry by the Standing Committee on Conservation, Heritage and Environment into environmental aspects and consequences of the stocking of the National Aquarium project, and I move:

That the recommendations be agreed to.

Mr Speaker, when the standing committee was established on 25 May this year its terms of reference included the ability of the committee to inquire into matters considered by the committee to be "of concern to the community". Under this power of inquiry, the committee undertook to respond to perceived concerns within the community over the environmental aspects of the National Aquarium project, which is adjacent to Scrivener Dam.

I should say at this point that it is, in my view, wholly appropriate that the committee have such a flexible power as to be able to consider matters of concern to the community. This is highly desirable, and situations such as this demonstrate my belief. I will refer later to the circumstances by which this issue arose for public inquiry by the committee.

Given the constraints of the time available to the committee, I believe that a thorough investigation of the issues entailed in this inquiry was achieved. Although the committee did not consider it appropriate to advertise for public submissions, it nonetheless publicised its inquiry through the media and sought the opinions of those persons and bodies who the committee felt were key players.

The committee met with officers of the ACT Administration and obtained the files relevant to the project of both the Administration and the Federal Department of Arts, Sport, the Environment, Tourism and Territories. The committee also took evidence formally from Mr Geoff Da Deppo, the developer and the proponent of the project, and from the curator of the project. The committee visited the site of the project and also inspected drainage and sewerage diagrams in the possession of ACT Electricity and Water.

It is worth noting that this project spanned the period before and after the advent of self-government for the Territory and, as such, originally came under the auspices of the Federal department known as DASETT and eventually came under the wing of the ACT Administration. Indeed, the continuing role of the Federal Government in overseeing projects of this kind remains unclear in light of two facts. The first is the uncertain status of the land on

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which the National Aquarium is located. At present the land is "territorial" but is to be designated "national" under the published plans. Secondly, the absence for the time being of comprehensive planning and environment legislation for the ACT means that some continuing role for the Federal legislation in this area - I refer particularly to the Federal Environment Protection (Impact of Proposals) Act 1974 - may have been and perhaps should be preserved for the time being.

The concerns raised for the consideration of the committee dealt principally with the potential environmental harm of escaped or released fish or aquatic organisms from the National Aquarium into surrounding waterways. In assessing these issues the committee examined the history of this project. In April 1986 O&E Da Deppo Holdings Pty Limited applied for a grant of a lease over block 1461 at Belconnen. In its application the project was described as a "trout based fish farm and tourist attraction" where it was intended to "stock and display native fish and possibly some other exotic species".

Although the applicant originally sought a site on the southern side of the Molonglo River, below Scrivener Dam, a site was eventually chosen to the north of the river and slightly to the west of the dam. The latter site is superior, in that the aquarium is above the one in 500 years flood limit on that site. A lease was executed on 18 July 1988. The ACT Administration generally endorsed the objects of the application and referred the proposal to what is now the Department of Arts, Sport, the Environment, Tourism and Territories for assessment under the Federal environment protection Act. DASETT concluded in March 1987 that with careful planning and management the project was environmentally acceptable.

It reached the view - and this was expressed in letter form to Mr Da Deppo in March 1987 - that an environmental impact assessment under that Federal Act was unnecessary, although certain changes were suggested to the lease. Those changes were incorporated in the lease in due course. I will return later to the role of DASETT in this whole affair.

As I have already mentioned, the committee was concerned to examine whether fish disease might be spread if fish or aquatic organisms were allowed to escape from the site of the project into adjacent waterways. The concerns of the committee were substantially allayed by discussions held with Mr Da Deppo and the curator of the project and by consultation with experts in aquatic biology. The committee found that the developer is required to obtain Commonwealth, now Territory, permission before importing any consignment of fish, and that this constitutes a considerable safeguard against the large-scale importation of fish diseases into the Territory.

In addition, a clause in the lease requires the lessee to notify the Administration promptly of the outbreak of any

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diseases on the project. In this respect the lessee is to provide a \$50,000 bank guarantee against which the Territory may claim in the event the lessee does not take remedial action as specified to control disease. If properly applied, these controls and others contained in legislation and the terms of the lease will provide significant protection against the spread of disease.

The question of whether fish or fish eggs or organisms could escape into the surrounding waterways was also explored by the committee.

After visiting the site and inspecting the drainage and sewerage diagrams, the committee was satisfied that the filtering system, the ozonisation of aquarium water before discharge and other safeguards applying to the project would ensure that no fish eggs or fish diseases could escape into the river system. The project's salt-water ponds and aquariums are part of a closed system and cannot produce harm to the surrounding environment. The freshwater system is not closed but is subject to a process of internal recycling and purification and further processing before being released into the sewerage system.

The committee was further satisfied that, even if fish were allowed to escape into the Molonglo River or Lake Burley Griffin, environmental damage would be unlikely to occur. The committee found that salt-water species would be unable to survive in freshwater because of their need for a high level of body salt and that tropical species need a higher water temperature than prevails in our local river systems.

There was, however, some paucity of evidence on the question of whether freshwater species from Northern Australian riverways might cause damage if allowed to escape. Evidence was presented to the committee that they would probably die because such fish are not adapted to the region and are used to warmer waters. Because of that element of doubt, albeit slight, the committee has recommended in the report that the Minister with responsibility for the environment in the ACT provide the conservator under the Nature Conservation Act with the necessary resources for him or her to determine the impact on the region of those freshwater species before a licence to import them is issued. The committee also recommends that the result of that assessment be conveyed by the Minister to the Assembly.

Mr Speaker, the foregoing comments should not be read as saying that the committee believes that community concerns about a general lack of consultation on the question of the whole project are unfounded. In this respect we felt that experience might lead us to view favourably other ways of proceeding with a site and project of this kind. The committee has recommended that the Government review the past policy of directly negotiating the sale of sites for one-off tourist attractions with developers. It also recommends that, before any change to the lease purpose

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clause in the case of this project is granted to allow the developer to display waterfowl and other animals, the responsible Minister assess the environmental impact of such a change and allow that assessment to be tabled in the Assembly for a period of time sufficient to ensure full public comment.

I want to touch on some other matters which became clear to the committee in its deliberations. First, the dire lack of full and proper environmental and planning legislation in the ACT must have contributed to some of the uncertainty surrounding the course of proper procedures in respect of this project. The committee recommends that such legislation be considered as soon as possible by the Assembly and that it contain a requirement that an assessment be undertaken of projects which have a potential impact on the amenity of the community environment, with the level of assessment to be appropriate to the potential environmental threat posed. The committee felt that henceforth large developments such as the National Aquarium project should be brought to the attention of the Assembly or one of its relevant committees before an offer of a lease is made.

The second matter of concern deals with speculation surrounding the project and comments made by, or attributed to, in particular, the Federal environment Minister in respect of the project. It has been repeatedly suggested over recent months that the Federal Government would consider conducting an environmental impact statement under its Federal environment Act if it were dissatisfied with the outcome of the inquiry, the report of which I now present. It was suggested in particular that the original advice I earlier referred to, of DASETT to the developer, that an environmental impact statement under that Federal Act would be unnecessary, is no longer relevant given a significant change in the nature of the project since it was originally approved.

The committee found that a basis for such assertions simply does not exist. Among the papers supplied to the committee was a file note dated 17 March 1987. It recorded a meeting by an officer of the department with Mr Da Deppo. The note clearly records Mr Da Deppo's confirmation that the commercial fish production component of the project had been dropped. Clearly, in these circumstances, the emphasis of the project became that of tourist facilities and the display of fish and crustacea in relation to those facilities. In that respect nothing has changed between the date of that file note and today; that is, the project is still substantially a tourist venture with the object of providing visual displays and associated tourist facilities.

It was in light of this essential characteristic of the project that the Federal department decided on 24 March 1987 to advise Mr Da Deppo that the project would not require an environmental impact statement under the Federal

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Act. To suggest that some dramatic change in the purpose of the project has occurred necessitating a fresh appraisal of the environmental impact is simply false.

It has been a matter of irritation to the community that comments made by, or attributed to, the Federal Minister suggest that serious environmental concerns have been or are being unmet by this Assembly or by its Conservation, Heritage and Environment Standing Committee. Having assessed in some detail the issues concerning the environmental impact of the project, the committee is unable to identify the matters of concern which apparently gave rise to Senator Richardson's comments. Indeed, I wrote some weeks ago to the Minister seeking an indication of the basis for his purported concern and have yet to receive a reply. It is my hope, Mr Speaker, that in future the Federal Minister can abstain from interfering in matters which should be, and can be, competently handled within the processes of this now sovereign parliament.

Unfortunately, the honourable Minister was not the only person to pass comment on the issues before our committee before its report was available for public perusal. On several occasions comments have been made by the president of the Residents Rally, Mr Chris Donohue, which I have to say I found unfortunate, to say the least. Most recently, in yesterday's Chronicle Mr Donohue was quoted as follows:

It is a great pity that the ACT Legislative Assembly is not able to appreciate the great potential harm that will arise if this project is not properly controlled. If the Assembly does not move quickly then it seems that the federal government will. The Canberra community is entitled to be concerned over the Assembly's fumbling on this urgent issue.

Mr Whalan: That was Sir Robert, was it?

MR HUMPHRIES: Indeed, Deputy Chief Minister. Mr Speaker, I want to place on record my rejection of these and other comments made by Mr Donohue. The inquiry conducted by the committee was, as I have said, as comprehensive as time allowed, and I am confident that every effort has been made to explore the issues which Mr Donohue raised publicly before and since the commencement of the inquiry.

The fact is that the evidence of environmental harm Mr Donohue was so sure exists simply does not, at least to the best of our inquiries. If Mr Donohue had better knowledge than the committee, he ought to have put it before the committee as evidence. I wish to indicate, Mr Speaker, that I will be raising this matter with you privately to explore whether a contempt of the Assembly has occurred.

I think, however, it would be wrong of me to pretend that members of the Assembly itself are entirely free of opprobrium in this matter. I mentioned earlier my concerns

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at the way in which this issue was originally put before the committee for its consideration. Allegations were made by a member of the committee, Mr Moore, in substantially the same terms as those raised by Mr Donohue in respect of the project. The issues were raised, not privately with me as chairman of the committee but publicly in the media, and claims which the committee, including Mr Moore, now acknowledge to be substantially discredited were made against the project.

I think we would do well, Mr Speaker, to bear in mind the responsibility which we carry as members of this place. We enjoy privileged positions and from those privileged positions can do great damage to reputations without necessarily being held as accountable for our comments as other members of the community might be. It is my sincere hope that in future members of the Assembly do not adopt a "shoot first and ask questions later" approach, but rather raise matters of concern within the context of the committee's capacity for self-referral as a port of first call.

I want to put on record my sincere hope that nothing which has transpired in these proceedings has acted to permanently damage or smear the reputation of either Mr Da Deppo or the project which he has called the National Aquarium. I have to say I was very excited by the concept and implementation of the project and sincerely hope that it is as much of a success as I believe it has the potential to be.

Finally, I want to put on record my thanks and appreciation to the secretary of the committee, Ms Peta Roberts, whose indefatigable assistance was always of great assistance to me and, I am sure, to other members of the committee.

MS MAHER (11.12): As a member of the Standing Committee on Conservation, Heritage and Environment, the tabling of this report of the inquiry into the National Aquarium gives me pleasure. I agree with all the recommendations in the report and I hope that the Government implements them at the appropriate times. Mr Humphries has already given a very detailed outline of the history of the project, the reasons why the committee was formed and the recommendations, and really that does not leave a lot to be said. I support all his comments, especially those with regard to the Federal Minister and his statements on the environmental study.

This inquiry underlines the importance of the powers of such committees of this Assembly. There was some speculation concerning the environmental aspects of the project. People had doubts about the viability and the environmental aspects of the National Aquarium, and I feel that this committee has alleviated a lot of that speculation - or at least I hope it has. I am sure that the controls which already exist over the site - including the need for a licence to import fish and for waste

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disposal - and also the controls suggested by the committee will mean that the public can be assured that this project will be safe.

There was much concern over a seeming lack of public consultation with the granting of the lease of the site, and one of the recommendations of this committee is that on projects like this the opportunity for consultation be made available to the public. After having all the briefings - and may I say that I appreciate the briefings that we did get, and the people involved were very helpful - I really do not have any worries about the environmental aspects of this project. I wish Mr Da Deppo and other people involved all the best and I hope they succeed. I also would like to thank Peta Roberts for all her assistance during the inquiry.

MR WOOD (11.14): I support the remarks of Mr Humphries, who gave a very clear exposition of the committee's proceedings and the decisions that we have taken. This is an important debate because of the issues raised during it, but I believe it is more important because of its part in a wider debate.

There has been in this Territory a long-running debate, going back perhaps a year or more, in which there have been repeated claims from certain parts of the community about mismanagement or malpractice or abuses of the system; indeed the word "corruption" has sometimes been used. As a result of that, the Assembly has had to consider a number of matters, and that has been the prompt for one of our committees to inquire into whether there is a need to establish some sort of anti-corruption agency.

That has been the wider debate. But what has been the basis of all this debating? This report tells us. In this matter, as in many other matters, there has been a lot of noise but there has been no evidence. Now, I am very alert to what is going on. I am very concerned that when I put my signature on a report it is one that I can have confidence in, and when there are claims of dubious dealings and the like I look at our findings most carefully before I give my endorsement to it.

What does this report say? Well, let me tell you what this report says. I am putting this report into the context of that wider debate, and what this report says the wider debate will also show in due course. Let me give three quotes from this report. In the preface it is stated:

The committee attributes no blame whatsoever to Mr Da Deppo about the perceived lack of public consultation on the project and congratulates him on the innovativeness of the project.

Paragraph 9.6 in the report states:

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The committee appreciates that Mr Da Deppo is keen to ensure he meets any obligations relating to current environmental controls and congratulates him for the sensitivity he has shown in organising the aquarium display, of which the city of Canberra will undoubtedly be proud.

Paragraph 10.4 states:

The committee during its investigation found no irregularities on the part of any party, including the developer and its proponent Mr Geoff Da Deppo in relation to any matters.

I have no doubt that in this and in a whole range of other matters the claims that are repeated from time to time in our community, most recently by the president of the Residents Rally, will clearly be shown to be spurious and false. The message is that this administration, both before this Government came into existence and since Rosemary Follett became Chief Minister, has been sound. There is no question about that. So these people who stand up in the public domain and make all sorts of claims should take the message and think before they make claims and see that what they say has some basis.

What instigated this report? First of all it was claims and questions about the lease. There was something fishy about it, to make a pun. Then later there were claims about potential environmental damage. Well, our very careful examination of all the papers shows that everything was properly done. It was completely in accordance with procedures. The committee has recommended one or two relatively minor changes or steps so that the public might be better aware of what is happening, but our exhaustive inquiry into all the documents found everything was quite proper.

Secondly, the environmental consequences caused comment, and this is now the major factor that worries us. Senator Richardson may yet require an environmental study. If so, he will be doing a retrospective act. If so, he will be admitting to an error on the part of a department which he did not administer at that time, because nothing has changed since the lease approval was given. Nothing has changed. Mr Humphries has pointed that out. The evidence in the documents makes that very clear. There has been no change since the lease was given. Mr Da Deppo has a current application, about which we make some comment. So if Senator Richardson does go ahead he will be showing a severe criticism of officers now in his department.

What if Senator Richardson decides that the development should not proceed? What is he going to do? Will he dismantle the site, bring in the jackhammers and knock all the concrete out and compensate Mr Da Deppo? We appreciate Senator Richardson's genuine concern for the environment. I have no doubt about that.

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Mr Collaery: When is your Government going to order an environmental impact study for anything in this city?

MR WOOD: You have not seen all the things that have been happening, Mr Collaery. I do not question Senator Richardson's genuine concern, but I do question the briefings that he has been given. The Murray-Darling system, into which these waters from the Molonglo flow, is a major system of the world and certainly Australia's greatest. It has already suffered enough damage in 200 years of our more recent settlement and we should see that we do nothing more to add to that damage.

Do we need an environmental impact statement on such matters? In Australia already we have seen the devastation that can be wrought by means of introduced species, beginning with the rabbits, then with the cactus, cane toads, buffaloes, sparrows - you name it. We have done a great deal to destroy our natural environment. In this system already we have introduced carp and redfin. We have done that. So we make the clear claim that we do not want any more introduced species in the Murray-Darling system that will do potential damage. They do not belong there; we do not want them there. That would have the potential for damage. I accept that. I do not need anybody to tell me that we do not want anything more put into that river system. That being the case, the real issue is that we do not want fish getting out of this aquarium. It has to be a secure system; that is the overriding requirement.

Senator Richardson might consider whether the aquarium should have been built on a tributary of that major system. But it is there, it has been approved properly by all departments and, short of dismantling it, all we can do is look at the systems in the aquarium - and the committee has done that exhaustively. We have done it with advisers, and our conclusion is that the system at the National Aquarium is sound. It is as safe as it can possibly be. We have made, as Mr Humphries pointed out, a number of relatively minor, though certainly important, recommendations on a number of related issues. But, on the basic issue of the soundness of that system and the right for the development to proceed, our decision is that it should go ahead, and good luck to everybody concerned.

MR MOORE (11.24): Recommendation 4 of the committee states:

The Minister with portfolio responsibilities for the Environment should provide the Conservator with the necessary resources for him/her to determine the impact on the region of the freshwater species and organisms which are not indigenous to the area and proposed to be displayed in the aquarium, before any licence to import is issued; and

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. that the Minister responsible inform the Assembly (or the Speaker) the results of such an assessment.

I think that that recommendation takes into account my own major concern over this particular project, and I will come back to that. Let me, first of all, compliment the secretary of this committee, Peta Roberts, for her dedication and for her thoroughness in pursuing each area and each individual problem that I had, whether it was on a planning matter, a matter of zoology or a matter of transport - a whole series of matters. Whatever it was, she pursued it thoroughly and examined things carefully and came back with a series of options, a series of questions or a series of people that I could contact in order to satisfy myself. Let me say right now that, if I were dissatisfied with this particular report, then I would have written a minority report. I have not written a minority report because I am satisfied with the recommendations that the committee has come up with.

I would like to go back to why I originally wrote to the committee and asked that it look into this matter after first trying to get the Assembly, as a whole, to pass it onto the committee. Let me say now that, having been through that procedure, I think on the next occasion I will simply take it to the committee and use the procedure that I eventually did come to. There was a public perception problem about the National Aquarium which concerned the fish farm, the aquarium, and the fact that there were going to be fish there that were not native to the Murray-Darling at a spot that was so close to the Murray-Darling.

A lot of those problems had to do with the fact that we were told - and I was so informed - that the particular project was within the one in 100 years or the one in 500 years flood level. The map that I have with me clearly indicates that Mr Da Deppo's aquarium project is above those flood lines. That was for me the most important factor in my agreeing with the committee's report.

Let me take you to the original question of the aquarium; how it came to me and why I pursued it. It was brought to me originally by Mr Donohue of the Residents Rally, and one of the things that I had to do was sort out the issues and the personalities. While the other people were looking at just the issues, I was in the process of trying to determine how much was issue and how much was personality.

Let me also take you back to a series of corruption debates in this Assembly some time ago when we had a situation of the big, bad Paul Whalan and the even bigger, perhaps badder, Mr Geoff Da Deppo. Did \$100,000 change hands? What evidence was there on Mr Collaery's corruption file? The evidence was presented. It was absolutely pathetic. And I must say it is a great joy to me to have the chance, now that I do not have to be tied by solidarity, to say that and to say how disgusted I was at being taken along by

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the most pathetic piece of evidence presented to this Assembly by a lawyer who should have known better, from his corruption file.

Let me tell you about that corruption file. That corruption file is full of newspaper clippings, with a couple of letters. That is the corruption file that this man has got.

Mr Collaery: You have never seen it. We never trusted you with it. Right?

MR MOORE: Deny it.

Mr Collaery: You have never seen it, Michael.

MR MOORE: This is the same person that Mr Jensen yesterday referred to as Genghis Khan.

Mr Jensen: No, I did not.

MR MOORE: His boss.

Mr Jensen: I was talking about my old boss, Michael - my old boss, Brigadier Colin Kahn, affectionately known as "Genghis".

MR MOORE: I had to sort out this kind of personality battle, which seems to be the earmark of Mr Collaery's approach to politics and to most of the things he does, and the issues. Having sorted that out, my first approach to Mr Da Deppo was to distance myself from any personalities. Mr Da Deppo is here, and I am sure he would confirm that my first approach, before the committee took on this inquiry, was to say to him, "I've never met you. I have nothing to do with judgments about corruption. That's not my scene and I don't intend to pursue it".

So I move to the issues. The first of the issues was the planning procedure - the direct sale of the site, the recommendation of the fish farm aquarium by the Canberra Development Board and by Ros Kelly on 29 August 1986, and then the following planning procedures. As Mr Wood said, after an exhaustive look at those files, I could not find anything that was not done in order, and that is why I am happy to support the statements, to which Mr Wood drew attention time and again, that we have seen no evidence of anything that could be construed in any way as corrupt.

Mr Collaery: Why did you raise it?

MR MOORE: I will continue on to the issues because I did not raise this matter on personalities; I raised it on issues. Recommendation 3 takes into account possible problems in terms of a principle about how things are sold, and that recommendation is that the Government review the past policy of directly negotiating with developers the sale of sites for one-off tourist attractions.

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I can see some positive reasons for doing that, and when that review occurs - and I hope this recommendation is not taken to mean that this cannot possibly happen - I hope that it will be in the context of what is the best thing for Canberra. The environmental issues included trees, pollution of water from Lake Burley Griffin, and the flood plain, which I have already mentioned. Most importantly as far as I was concerned, there was the question of the fish. I immediately eliminated the exotic fish that are already in the water system - the redfin, carp, trout and so forth - because displaying such fish is of no further risk whatsoever to the Murray-Darling system.

Then we looked at salt-water species. It was clear from the evidence that we had - and I checked this evidence with a zoologist - that the salt-water species not only could not possibly survive in the freshwater system, but the organisms and diseases that went with them also could not survive. However, the Australian native fish that are exotic to the Murray-Darling system certainly do present risks, and there certainly is some concern. Those risks have to do with whether or not those fish could survive. Mr Da Deppo's curator, David Seal, assured us that neither the fish nor any such organism could possibly survive.

In checking that statement, I have found that not to be the case. I will give you a simple example relating to a virus. A virus, as we all know, can live through quite a wide temperature range. So there is possibly a problem. I was told again and again that the solution to the problem is not in terms of those fish but is technical. Can we be sure that those fish will not escape? For that reason we visited Mr Da Deppo's aquarium site and went through the plumbing requirements very carefully with ACT Electricity and Water. We went through those requirements and we checked very carefully to see what would happen if a disaster occurred to one of those aquariums with a visual display of a certain thickness and a concrete tank even thicker and the fish got out into the sewerage system. We were assured that neither the fish themselves nor the disease they carry would get through the sewerage system. In other words, there is a fail-safe mechanism. (Extension of time granted)

So it is mainly a technical issue of plumbing, and that technical issue indicates that Mr Da Deppo's designers and his curator have done an excellent job in ensuring that the system is, as far as we can tell, safe. But because of the danger to the waterways, we still have some minor concern, and that concern is probably taken care of in our recommendation 6 - that is, that an assessment should be carried out by an independent person or body on the operation of the aquarium systems two months after operations begin. In other words, let the technical experts have a look and be doubly or triply sure that the technical systems do work and that, if any work needs to be done, a second assessment be carried out four months later.

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In the assessment the assessor shall take into account the operation of the aquarium water systems. As far as I am concerned, that does not apply to the salt-water area or to the other areas. We are talking specifically about a series of small aquariums, or aquaria, if you prefer - it is optional; both are in the dictionary, I have checked - which are the only ones that are of real concern to the public. Our committee has indicated that it believes those concerns are handled by a technical response and that that technical response appears, to the best of our knowledge, to be satisfactory.

The broader question, much more critical in terms of this whole concept, is that the public has to be sure. As Mr Wood said, there has been a series of allegations of corruption over the past year, and one of the concerns that people have is that public servants tend to be interested in not only advising their Ministers but also, where possible, trying to deliver for their Ministers. I am not taking away from public servants at all, because the public servants that we have dealt with in this and every other issue have advised competently, and everything that they have done has been, as far as I am concerned, in order. However, we still need to have the public reassured that everything is above board and in order. With that in mind, I will be presenting a positive approach on this issue to the Assembly, hopefully in the next sitting.

Mr Speaker, I am pleased to have this opportunity to be able to distinguish for the first time between dealing with issues and dealing with personalities. In this instance we are dealing with the issue. I believe that the Conservation, Heritage and Environment Committee has dealt with the issue very well and I believe that it is now incumbent upon me to apologise to Mr Da Deppo for anything that has caused him or his business any difficulties. In fact, I hope that the old adage about any advertising being good advertising rubs off on him to some extent anyway and that he gets some compensation in that way.

I accept my responsibility in that regard. However, I do feel it is important that, when an environmental question comes up, we use this forum to question and to be absolutely sure that our environment is being protected. That is particularly so when we are talking, as in this case, about the huge waterway, the Murray-Darling system. With those words, I commend to the Assembly the report of this inquiry into the environmental aspects of the National Aquarium project by this committee.

Debate (on motion by **Ms Follett**) adjourned.

Sitting suspended from 11.40 am to 2.30 pm

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Hospitals

MRS NOLAN: My question is directed to the Minister for Community Services and Health. Did the Government consult with the New South Wales Health Minister over the development of the hospital redevelopment plan? If so, what concerns were outlined by the New South Wales Government? If not, why did the Minister fail to consult with the New South Wales Government, given the fact that some 22 per cent of the ACT's acute hospital beds are occupied by non-ACT residents, mainly from the south-east region of New South Wales?

MR BERRY: Thank you, Mrs Nolan, for the question. In response to the first part of your question, there was no consultation with the New South Wales Government. The reason for that is that the treatment for New South Wales people who use our hospitals will not change; we will continue to offer first-class health care for them.

Royal Canberra Hospital

DR KINLOCH: My question is also addressed to the Minister for Community Services and Health. May I preface it by saying that I was much relieved to hear the Minister's assurance that there are no plans for a glitzy fun park or a casino on Acton Peninsula. I offer him, indeed, an apology for overreacting to one section of yesterday's statement, but I am sure he understands my concern. The worry persists, however. Could he spell out what is intended in the way of recreational facilities, and could these be quickly removed if it became necessary to upgrade the hospital to be, for example, a teaching hospital?

MR BERRY: Thank you, Dr Kinloch, for the question. The issue of community recreational facilities on the site is one in relation to which the final detail has not been settled because, as I have indicated, there is a long planning process which will go with the restructuring proposal. In line with the Government's policy on open government and consultation, I intend to make sure that the community as well as all of the players in the health system have an opportunity to have a say in what will go on the site.

It is intended, at this stage, that the site will become more attractive for community use, and where that can be enhanced by the provision of recreational facilities I expect that they will be provided. I think anybody who has visited the Royal Canberra Hospital site at any time and perhaps sat on the lawns at the front of Bennett House, would agree with me that it is a very beautiful site, and there is an opportunity to open the site up a little more for community use. I think, if recreational facilities of

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a minor nature are provided and we can accommodate more community use on the site, we ought to do that.

Sports Facilities

MR WOOD: I direct a question to the Minister for Industry, Employment and Education. I refer him to reports in today's media about proposals to greatly develop the indoor stadium at Bruce. I was not aware that this was yet, if at all, coming under our control. Could he tell us whether there are serious proposals under way in relation to this matter?

MR WHALAN: I thank Mr Wood for this question. The statement in the Canberra Times regarding the possible redevelopment of the Bruce indoor stadium or the construction of a complex at Kingston, Weston or Tuggeranong by the ACT Government is not an accurate representation of the current position. As members will be aware, this Government is doing a lot for sport in the ACT and has given substantial recognition to the importance of sport as a contribution to community spirit, as an industry and as an enhancement to individuals' health and fitness.

Our endeavours at Bruce outdoor stadium, the construction of major new netball, hockey and gymnastics facilities are but an example of the Government's commitment. In total, the Government will spend more than \$7m on sporting facilities, administration and other forms of assistance to sporting groups this financial year.

The Government is continually reviewing the adequacy of sporting facilities in a number of areas, including one of Canberra's most significant sports - basketball. In relation to basketball, however, I would stress that we are at only a very preliminary stage in considering options. We have not - and I emphasise that - had discussions with the Federal Minister regarding Bruce indoor stadium or, indeed, other alternatives. I would stress that our discussions with the management of the Canberra Cannons as well as representatives of the ACT Basketball Association are of a preliminary search nature to identify future requirements for both elite and general basketball participants in the Territory.

I am aware that both organisations are investigating options for substantially enhancing seating and other facilities at some future date. We regularly conduct such discussions with all sections of the sporting community through our various peak industry bodies and with individual associations. Such discussions are an integral part of future planning to identify needs and to canvass options. I would stress, however, that the Government has no plans to spend \$3m to \$5m on a new or upgraded basketball stadium in the ACT.

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Hospitals

MR STEFANIAK: My question, Mr Speaker, is directed to the Minister for Community Services and Health. I refer to the comments by the ACT President of the Hospital Employees Federation, Bruce Tunks, who was quoted on the front page of today's Canberra Times as saying:

This whole thing was conceived by the Federal Government, endorsed by the Kearney inquiry, rubber-stamped by yellow unions and implemented by a Mickey Mouse Government that couldn't care less about community wishes.

It's just another example of how the Australian Labor Party regards the average Australian, with absolute contempt.

I ask the Minister: what consultations took place with the HEF over the redevelopment of the hospital system? Given the obvious hostility of Mr Tunks, can the Minister explain why he has failed to allay the fears of this union?

MR BERRY: Thank you. I must say that I appreciate the concern - and I guess the general public will appreciate the concern - which is being expressed about a trade union by Mr Stefaniak. I must say that is a refreshing change of direction for the Liberal Party, and I hope it is something that we will see more of in the future because it will warm the hearts of many.

Mr Humphries: It could get a bit hot if you don't watch out.

MR BERRY: Well, I can stand the heat.

Mrs Grassby: You forget he's a fireman.

MR SPEAKER: Order!

MR BERRY: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I am aware of the comments on the front page of the Canberra Times. In relation to the consultation process, it was open to all of the players in the health system and the community generally. The Health Employees Federation would have been welcome to make any contribution that it wished to make in the process, and the union has to live with that. The Government has different imperatives, and it has made a decision on the basis of delivering a first-class health system. I expect and hope that the Health Employees Federation will assist us in the delivery of that when we go through the restructuring process for our hospital system.

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Mentally Disturbed Offenders

MR COLLAERY: My question is addressed to the Chief Minister as Minister for justice. I draw her attention to reports this week in the Canberra Times, in which again the chief magistrate, Mr Cahill, has drawn attention to the lack of proper facilities for mentally disturbed or apparently mentally disturbed persons before the courts. I ask the Minister whether this longstanding issue, constantly raised by the Residents Rally and commented upon by the chief magistrate, will receive proper attention from her Government. I note that some provision was made in the budget for counselling and some support facilities at the remand centre and Woden Valley Hospital, but these matters do not include a purpose-built facility for the accommodation and the assessment of these persons.

MS FOLLETT: I thank Mr Collaery for his question. As he has pointed out, the Government has addressed this matter in a preliminary way in our current budget, which is before the Assembly. We have made some provision in that budget for enhanced facilities for mentally disturbed or psychiatrically ill offenders in the ACT.

It is an area that is extremely difficult to deal with. Our first proposal in the draft budget was apparently not satisfactory to the majority of people who are well informed on these matters, so it has been subject to some revision. We have taken some steps in this first budget towards assisting people who are in this very unfortunate position. I am aware of Magistrate Cahill's continuing concern as well.

Mr Speaker, it is certainly an issue that needs some very close attention. I am confident that Mr Berry, as Minister for Community Services and Health, has that whole matter of the mentally ill under close scrutiny. As I say, we have made some provision in the budget for enhanced facilities to accommodate these people who unfortunately come before the courts.

MR COLLAERY: I ask a supplementary question. Chief Minister, I welcome your comments, but I draw attention again to the chief magistrate's comments being, as they are, after your budget has come down. I draw to your attention that you have spent \$299,000 in your budget for a tearoom at the Belconnen tip. I ask you whether you are prepared to reorder your priorities in the light of - -
-

Mr Whalan: On a point of order Mr Speaker; this particular question is totally out of order.

MR COLLAERY: Why? Does it hurt? Does it hurt me?

MR SPEAKER: Order!

Mr Whalan: Mr Collaery, where it hurts you, it doesn't hurt me; I can assure you of that.

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MR SPEAKER: What is the point of order?

Mr Whalan: Mr Speaker, the question is completely out of order. It bears no relationship to and is a total departure from the original question.

MR SPEAKER: Order, Deputy Chief Minister! Please do not debate the point of order. Please stick to the point of the question, Mr Collaery.

MR COLLAERY: I will rephrase the question, Mr Speaker. Minister, in view of your response, that you have given preliminary attention to this issue, will you again look at other budget priorities, including \$299,000 for a new amenities building at the Belconnen Tip or land fill site, and will you undertake - - -

Mr Whalan: On a point of order, Mr Speaker; it is exactly the same question, and the use of the standing orders - - -

MR SPEAKER: Order! Mr Collaery, that is not a supplementary question as such. I think you are debating another point.

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

MR SPEAKER: I would like to inform the Assembly that we have two members of the Norfolk Island Legislative Assembly, Mr John Brown and Mr Rick Robinson, present in the gallery. On behalf of all members, I extend a warm welcome to our visitors.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Government Cars

MR MOORE: My question is directed to you, Mr Speaker. Could you please inform the Assembly whether the members of the Residents Rally have handed back the keys to their government cars, or was their undertaking to do so merely grandstanding for the sake of any media presence at last Friday's preschool rally?

MR SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr Moore, for the question. I have received from Mr Collaery a letter advising that his party did not realise the full implications of its offer to sell the cars to provide money for the preschools. Mr Collaery therefore wishes to withdraw the offer and welcomes the use of the Assembly pool vehicles.

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ACTION Dispute

MR DUBY: My question is addressed to the laughing cavalier, the Minister for Industry, Employment and Education. It is a question about ACTION bus services.

Mr Whalan: If it is industrial - - -

MR DUBY: It is an industrial matter. I will address it to the Minister. I refer to the industrial action being taken by ACTION employees in the form of no bus services to the Commonwealth Parliament House and ask him whether he agrees that the union's action is inconveniencing not those against whom it is intended, namely the politicians - for, as we all know, not many politicians catch buses - but instead ACT citizens who are mere employees at Parliament House. I also ask: how long is the situation going to be allowed to go on?

MR WHALAN: I thank Mr DUBY for the question. The point is that the bans - not only the ACTION bans but also a whole range of other industrial actions - have been rather unfortunately targeted at the citizens of the ACT. We are not directly involved. However, we are confident that the industrial action will be called off later today. The action has been in protest against the attitude taken by the Federal Government to the pay claims made by various public sector unions representing a whole cross-section of employees.

The ACT Government, unfortunately, has not been a party to the recent negotiations, and local action against it and the citizens of the ACT has been misguided. However, I understand that the Federal Government has now reached an agreement with the ACTU and the public sector unions on the basis that all bans and limitations are lifted. I believe the unions will be considering their response later this afternoon, but the expectation is that the agreement will be ratified and industrial action will cease.

Hospitals

MR KAINE: I address a question to the Minister for Community Services and Health, who yesterday indicated what the Government intends to do about our public hospitals at a capital cost of \$210m. I understand that was the figure. In the same report, the Kearney report, which led to that decision, it was suggested that staff savings in the central administration be identified by management. I would like to ask the Minister: have any staff savings in the area of administration yet been identified by his departmental managers? If not, when does he intend to ensure that such a review is carried out to identify such potential savings to offset some of the \$210m we have to find to keep the hospitals going?

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MR BERRY: I would like to thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question. The administration of the hospital system, as the Leader of the Opposition, I am sure, would agree, is a very important feature of a first-quality health system. I think that this Government made it clear during the election process that any fat that was in the system would be discovered and where there were unnecessary administrative costs they would be turned to focus more on patient care.

There is no review going on at the moment, but I can say that in the budget process the administrative area, as the rest of the hospital system, bore some of the savings options as well. So it was part of the budget process to - - -

Mr Humphries: Can you be more specific?

MR BERRY: I have not got the figures in front of me, but I can say to you that, in terms of the budget process, the administrative area of community services and health was subjected to savings requirements.

MR KAINE: I ask a supplementary question, Mr Speaker. I asked specifically not about the hospital administration but about the central administration. The budget makes no reference to the kinds of savings about which I am talking here. That was one of my criticisms of it - that it talks about peripheral savings in terms of nurse shift overlap and that sort of saving at the hospitals, but it does not address the question of savings in the central administration, and that was the direction of my question. I wonder whether the Minister would care to answer it.

MR BERRY: I think I answered it before when I said that the administrative costs were subjected to savings in the budget process. The term "administrative costs" relates to a whole range of administrative areas, which includes the central administration.

Mr Kaine: But there are no staff savings identified there.

MR BERRY: Well, they are the sorts of savings, Mr Leader of the Opposition, which come from a reduction in costs. It usually reflects itself in staff savings in the administrative area.

Street Lighting

MR JENSEN: My question is directed to the Minister for Housing and Urban Services. I got it right today, Ellnor. I refer the Minister to representations which have been made to her by residents of Argyle Square, off Ainslie Avenue, Reid, for improved street lighting in the area. The Residents Rally has been advised that there have been a number of muggings and other incidents in the vicinity

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recently. Can the Minister advise whether the street lighting will be upgraded as a matter of priority?

MRS GRASSBY: Thank you, Mr Jensen. I am glad you got my title right. We did have a check of all street lighting in Canberra, which showed that there is the amount of lighting that there should be. As you said that you have had complaints from the residents in that area and they still feel the lighting is not appropriate, I will have my department look at that again and I will get back to you. If it does need more lighting, we will look at putting more lighting in.

MR JENSEN: I have a supplementary question, Mr Speaker. My understanding was that the Minister has been contacted by the residents. My question really related to the degree of consultation or contact which she has had with the residents and what she proposes to do about it.

MRS GRASSBY: Mr Jensen, I have not had the letter yet, unless it went to the department. It has not come across my desk yet, but I will definitely look into it. As I say, the lighting in the car parks and all the other areas was queried in a question from Mrs Nolan earlier in the sitting of the parliament. I had lighting checked around Canberra at that stage, and it was adequate. But, as you say, in that area there are already complaints. I will have it checked again and, if we find that it is not adequate, we will contact the residents who you tell me have written to me and we will do something about it.

Hospitals

MR HUMPHRIES: My question is addressed to the Minister for Community Services and Health. The Government has said it would seek assistance from the Federal Government in the redevelopment of the hospital system. Did the Minister consult with the Federal Government over the future of Canberra's hospital system prior to the making of this decision announced yesterday? If he did, what was the Federal Government's reaction to the Minister's proposals? In the interests of full public debate, to which the Minister has already referred today, will he table a summary of those consultations? If he did not consult with the Federal Government, why did he fail to do so, given the vital importance, indeed the absolute necessity, of Federal funding if this hospital redevelopment is to proceed?

MR BERRY: One of the very good points about question time in this house - it might be bad from the questioner's point of view, but it is good for the one who receives the question - is that you really cannot be instructed on how to answer the question. In terms of the question you asked, I would just like to make it clear - all these points are public knowledge, and I am sure that you are aware of them - that the Government did inherit a rundown ACT health system from the Commonwealth.

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Mr Jensen: Shame!

Mr Collaery: From the Federal Government.

Mr Jensen: The Labor Government.

Mr Collaery: The Federal Labor Government.

Mr Kaine: He's not answering your question.

Mrs Grassby: Well, give him a chance.

MR SPEAKER: Order!

MR BERRY: Mr Speaker, with a bit of order I would be able to answer the question.

Mr Kaine: We don't want a lecture on what the Government gave us - - -

MR BERRY: Well, the buffoons across the way - - -

Mr Kaine: We want to know what you are doing about the \$150m you need.

MR BERRY: If the buffoons across the way can just - - -

Mrs Grassby: We'll find it; don't worry.

MR BERRY: I will handle it, Ellnor. The ACT Government inherited a rundown ACT health system from the Commonwealth. That is public knowledge, and it requires an immediate response in order to ensure that a first-class health system is delivered in Canberra. I think the Government's decision, which was announced yesterday, goes a long way to addressing the issue of first-class health delivery to the people of Canberra, both now and well into the future. I have made it clear that we intend to take the health system well into the next century and in a first-class condition.

We know, on the advice that we have now, that it will take five to seven years to rebuild the health system. I have said, as has been quite correctly put, that it will cost \$200m to \$210m. All of those figures are correct. The opposition knows as well that we have asked the Federal Government for \$150m to assist in the restructuring of our hospital system.

Mr Kaine: They said they are going to give it to us.

MR BERRY: The answer to that is that we have not got the \$150m and, like any responsible government should do, we will continue to pressure the Federal Government for that money to help us in the rebuilding of our hospital system.

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MR HUMPHRIES: I ask a supplementary question, Mr Speaker. I have to ask the question again, as there is really no other way of getting the Minister to answer it. What was the Federal Government's reaction to the Minister's proposals? In the interests of full public debate, will the Minister table a summary of those consultations?

MR BERRY: We have not - - -

Mr Humphries: But you have not answered that. He said he has had talks; that is all he said.

MR BERRY: We have not got the \$150m.

Mr Humphries: Well, what is their response? Did they give a reason? Why no \$150m?

MR BERRY: They have not said no, Mr Humphries.

Mr Humphries: That is a slight advance. Is there any other information you can supply?

MR BERRY: They have not said anything. What I have said is that this Government, quite responsibly, quite in accord with its promise to deliver responsible government to this Territory, has asked the Commonwealth for \$150m to assist us in the restructuring of our hospital system. That was a responsible action, but we have not yet received a response.

Mental Health Services

MR COLLAERY: My question is directed to the Minister for Community Services and Health. At the annual general meeting of the ACT Association for Mental Health on 22 October 1989 - that is, after the budget - the following motion was passed:

This meeting expresses its strong concern at indications that government financial support for mental health services in the ACT is to be reduced, both in absolute terms and as a proportion of the ACT Government's health budget.

Mental health services in the ACT are underresourced and compare unfavourably with services in New South Wales, Victoria and other States. Minister, will you advise the Assembly whether you have any plans to reduce expenditure on mental health services in the ACT this year, in view of the increasing amount of mental health disturbances in the Territory at this time?

MR BERRY: Thank you, Mr Collaery, for the question. I am aware of media reports in relation to that meeting, which I indeed opened. I am not aware of the resolution that you stated. What needs to happen in response to that sort of a

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question, Mr Speaker, is some announcement of the achievements of the Government in relation to mental health in the Territory. I think one of the most important achievements of late is my announcement of the Mental Health Advisory Committee which has been established and which has had its first meeting.

That is going to be a fundamental part of the development of government policy on mental health, and I informed that meeting that that would be the case. The committee is made up of important people from the community who are concerned with mental health, and I am sure that all of their policy deliberations will be positive ones.

In relation to the delivery of mental health services, the Government announced a new policy proposal for a 24-hour mental health service in the last budget, and this initiative is designed to ensure that there is an improved mental health admission assessment system for ward 12B at the Woden Valley Hospital.

There are a couple of options being developed in relation to that. The first option being considered is improving the availability of medical staff to ensure prompt psychiatric assessment and management. The second option is the provision of an after-hours on-call service staffed by a nurse based at ward 12B, Woden Valley Hospital. As part of the development I will be exploring the capacity that this service will have to meet the needs of people experiencing mental illness and their carers and relatives.

Another important service, which is one about which I think you are particularly concerned, is the improved secure care for the psychiatrically ill. This was developed, as was the other proposal that I have just mentioned, as a result of the Government's budget consultation process.

Providing adequate medical care for the psychiatrically ill is a complex task, as we all know. For those who are alleged to have committed criminal or antisocial acts, the complexities are even greater. Our major population centres can address these complexities by setting up psychiatric units within prison hospitals, but the ACT is not in that position. So we have the choice of providing a secure arrangement at Woden Valley Hospital or at the Belconnen Remand Centre. The issue which has to be addressed is whether it is appropriate to have those sorts of facilities in the Woden Hospital because the hospital would suffer from the intrusion of security arrangements and custodial staff into ward 12B. It is felt that that would have a detrimental effect on the patients.

The Government favours the provision of a facility at the Belconnen Remand Centre, and the use of this facility acknowledges that the people in question have been directed to us by the courts because of their behaviour and the risk of further antisocial behaviour. To set up the new program, some modification to the building will be

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necessary, together with revised staffing arrangements, and work will be commencing shortly to plan the necessary changes.

All of those issues demonstrate a commitment by the Government to providing better resources for the mentally ill, but I think everybody will agree that there is always an argument at large which supports more resources for these sorts of facilities. I am quite certain, Mr Speaker, that the Government will take a sympathetic view in future budgets to the further development and improvement of facilities for the mentally ill.

Hospitals

MRS NOLAN: Again, my question is directed to the Minister for Community Services and Health. I draw his attention to the Kearney report recommendation that the one principal hospital plan be implemented within a three-year period. We all know the reasons for the Minister implementing his plan over a minimum of five to seven years. I wonder how the Minister can justify this time frame when in his statement yesterday he said that the redevelopment of the ACT public hospital system is urgent and essential.

MR BERRY: One of the things that I have learned in my very short association with the health portfolio, Mr Speaker, is the complexity of it. I am sure that Mrs Nolan would agree that the provision of health services in Canberra is a complex issue, and I am sure if she takes the trouble to have a close look at our hospitals she will agree even more so. The delivery of a first-class health system through three hospitals is a complex issue, particularly when the sorts of proposals which were recommended in the Kearney report are to be implemented, and the implementation requires the transfer of services and a comprehensive rebuilding and refurbishment of the hospital system.

The advice that the Government has taken is well sourced. It is sourced from responsible quantity surveyors that have long experience in the health industry. I have already ensured that members of the Liberal Party were introduced to people who deal with that sort of work, and they were briefed in relation to the complexities of the hospital system. I would hope that that briefing would have convinced them that it is a complex issue and that we ought to take their advice, that it will take five to seven years to deliver the full program.

One issue that has not been raised in the question by Mrs Nolan is the fact that it will take about a year to get the initial planning stages ready, more or less before a blow is struck. So it is a long process, but it is important to do it properly, to hasten slowly and to ensure that the Government's aim to deliver a first-class health system to the people of Canberra is one that we achieve, and achieve without too much disruption.

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NATIONAL BETTER HEALTH PROGRAM
Ministerial Statement and Paper

Mr Kaine: This'll be a ripper.

MR BERRY (Minister for Community Services and Health), by leave: Well, I am glad that the Leader of the Opposition is waiting with - - -

Mrs Grassby: With bated breath.

MR BERRY: Waiting with bated breath and I - - -

Mr Humphries: He needs better health.

MR BERRY: They are indeed about health issues. It is very interesting to hear the cynical remarks of the spokesman for health from the Liberal Party about the delivery of better health in the ACT.

Mr Speaker, I would like to announce the involvement of this Government in a most exciting program - and I can assure the Leader of the Opposition that it is so exciting that he will even get enthusiastic about it if he pays close attention to what I have to say - to promote the health of all Australians, including those in the ACT and including the Leader of the Opposition. This program is called the national better health program, and I would like to give you some background to its development.

In 1981, the World Health Organisation produced a report on the formulation of global strategies to achieve health for all by the year 2000. These were later adopted by the thirty-fourth World Health Assembly. The World Health Organisation health for all program is concerned not only with health improvement but also with themes and principles considered vital to the aim of attaining better health across all population groups. The key themes are: equity, health promotion, development of primary health care to enhance preventive activity, and increased consumer participation.

A further development occurred in 1986 at the international conference on health promotion where the five principles of the Ottawa charter for health promotion were announced: building healthy public policy, creating supportive environments, strengthening community action, developing personal skills, and reorienting health services towards health promotion.

These form the basis for what has become known as the "new public health". Now both these initiatives - the World Health Organisation health for all and the new public health - have been influential in the development of an Australian initiative, the health for all Australians report, announced by the Federal Minister for Community Services and Health, my Labor Party colleague, Dr Neal Blewett. He announced that in April 1985.

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The health for all document announced national goals and targets for population groups, major causes of illness and death and risk factors. Included in these goals and targets is the target of a 25 per cent reduction in current differences in health status among population groups, most notably between Aborigines and other Australians, and between high and low socioeconomic groups.

Through the report, the Minister also announced a cost shared Commonwealth-State-territories program, the national better health program, which focuses on five priority areas: preventable cancer - lung cancer, cervical cancer, breast cancer and skin cancer; nutrition; injury; hypertension; and the elderly.

The national better health program is an innovative program in the area of health promotion. It is the first time such an initiative has been attempted on such a scale and with State-Commonwealth cooperation at all levels. It is the practical expression of our contribution to an international effort under the auspices of the World Health Organisation.

This Government supports an approach to health care delivery which contains a balance between treatment and services on the one hand and prevention on the other. Like all governments in developed Western countries, we are also rightly concerned with the spiralling costs of health care. In Australia, for instance, the total cost of health care has been rising due to increased use of medical services and the increased use of technological aids in both the diagnosis and treatment areas. In 1969-70 there were 4.39 medical services per person. By 1986-87 this had increased by almost 95 per cent to 8.54 services per person - almost double.

This blowout of spending on medical services and technological aids can be seen clearly when we look at how the total health budget is divided between different health services. As you would expect, the lion's share, 55.6 per cent, goes to health facilities - hospitals, nursing homes and other institutions. After that, 38.7 per cent goes to other non-institutional services, such as medical, dental, community health and other professional services; pharmaceuticals; and aids or appliances.

And what of health promotion and illness prevention? What proportion of the health budget do you think is set aside for the longer-term changes necessary to promote good health in our communities? I am sure you will be shocked to learn that as a nation we put aside only 0.8 per cent for spending in this area. I am sure you will agree that spending on health promotion and illness prevention represents a minuscule amount of the overall health dollar.

The human and financial costs of an inadequate prevention focus are high. The trouble is, it is easier to

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concentrate on short-term benefits. You feel bad, so you go to the doctor or take a pill. It is difficult for any of us, as individuals or as a society, to look at the long-term benefits of preventive measures. But be sure that neglect results often in avoidable illness, in disability and in premature death. International comparisons between areas of high and low health status show that alterable factors such as diet appear overwhelmingly to explain the dramatic differences that can be observed.

Think of it this way: the cost of doing nothing is greater than just the cost for treatment and care of preventable conditions. This is because you must add to the treatment costs the costs for income maintenance and the associated loss of productivity. Prevention is generally cheaper than treatment, although its benefits may not always be obvious in the short term. The incidence alone of preventable illness and premature death suggests that the potential to improve health and reduce expenditure in the long term is huge.

The National Health and Medical Research Council has expressed such views and the Better Health Commission concluded that, while the costs of good prevention measures initially exceed benefits, savings in avoidable illness, premature death and health care costs can be substantial.

It is, of course, difficult to make precise predictions on savings. However, we do know that preventable premature death, illness and injury exact a massive toll from Australia. Accurate costings of their burden on health services and loss of productivity are hampered by inadequate and fragmented information, but estimates obtained from a variety of sources give some clear indication of their magnitude.

Motor vehicle accidents, for example, cost \$3.5 billion per year, and members of the Assembly would see that in the context of the horrific accidents which have been reported on our national roads recently. Poor nutrition costs \$6 billion; cardiovascular disease, \$20 billion; alcohol abuse, \$1.5 billion; and injuries at the workplace, \$10 billion. It is to the credit of this Assembly that we have made some contribution to the reduction of injuries at the workplace by the introduction and passage of occupational health and safety legislation in this place yesterday. Add to these the costs of cigarette smoking and illegal drug use, and you begin to catch hold of the financial magnitude of the problem.

The financial case for prevention is perhaps nowhere more graphically shown than in the AIDS area, where only effective health promotion and illness prevention measures stand between the community and huge increases in health expenditures. It was just this sort of information which provided the rationale for the development of a coherent and well-funded national prevention program.

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Having provided you with some background to this exciting and innovative program, Mr Speaker, I would now like to give you a more detailed picture of the national better health program and what it will mean for the ACT. In March 1989 national project planning teams were set up for each of the five priority areas, consisting of a number of experts and those with practical experience in the various fields. There was also representation from the Commonwealth Department of Community Services and Health and the Australian Institute of Health. A member of the management committee provided program oversight.

Their task was to produce broad strategies and an outline of priority projects, within the parameters set out. They were to consider such issues as inequities in health status, relevant risk factors, community participation mechanisms and workplace requirements. The reports were delivered in July this year and contained a wide range of programs within the five areas. They also attempted to encourage ongoing structural changes, such as building healthy public policy, creating supportive environments, strengthening community action, developing personal skills and reorienting health services towards a health promoting focus.

Since then things have moved fairly quickly. The original five reports have been brought together to form the basis of a national strategic plan. It was decided that, given the still relatively small amounts available for the national better health program, a clustered approach of many projects would have a multiplier effect. In other words, rather than developing one project to do with, say, hypertension in a particular community, it would be more effective to combine that project with complementary projects in the areas of nutrition, preventable cancer and the health of the elderly. These "clusters" of projects can then be developed and implemented at three main sites: the community, the workplace and the schools.

At the moment, the Commonwealth secretariat to the national better health program management committee is in the final stages of developing a national strategic plan for the years 1989-90 to 1991-92. It is envisaged that there will be six levels to the overall program.

The first level will be called intervention programs. These will consist of the cluster of projects that will be implemented in conjunction with various communities, workplaces and schools across the country. The next has to do with changes to policy necessary to facilitate health promotion rather than a straight focus on treatment. Then there is the level to do with what we can call structural change. This includes reorienting hospital services towards health promotion and facilitating the development of an adequate primary health care network throughout the country.

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The fourth level is program communication. This involves a media strategy, particularly in relation to the intervention projects. The fifth is program evaluation. This will be most important to demonstrate outcomes at the end of the four-year period. The final level concerns program coordination, which will be essential for a coordinated, coherent program that works at both the local and national level.

What does this mean for the ACT? Planning is still in hand for the years 1990-92. However, in line with the national strategic plan, future directions for the ACT will involve clusters of intervention programs - in the community, the workplace and the school.

Information has been collected from each of the service areas in my department on the kinds of programs currently being run and how these mesh with the national better health priorities; what information or data is used to decide priorities at present; and what needs are seen for the future.

Carriage of the national better health program rests with health advancement services. There is an advisory committee, made up of various organisational and community representatives, to advise on the implementation of the program. It works in conjunction with the healthy cities council of reference, a community based intersectoral committee, with representatives from both government and non-government sectors.

Already funds of \$70,000 for 1988-89 have been allocated to three projects. The first is "neighbours". This project provides assistance for a community self-help group, by focusing on improved nutrition through the development of social health goals. The group has established a drop-in centre with a small library, kitchen and safe play area for children.

The second project is the health of older ACT residents and their carers. This project examines the health needs of older residents of the ACT, with major emphasis on the needs of carers, especially older carers, mental health problems of the elderly, needs of the isolated elderly, and injury surveillance. The project officer is collecting what data is available and will undertake a series of consultations with elderly people and their carers.

The third project is the male factor in human papilloma virus infection and cervical malignancy. The cancer prevention project is a workplace health promotion project aimed at increasing men's knowledge of the male role in the spread of an infection which is associated with cervical cancer, as well as raising awareness of the risks involved in unprotected sexual activity. This is being undertaken by the Family Planning Association.

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The outcome of these and future activities in the ACT will hopefully be demonstrable results in the five priority areas, plus structural changes in the system, which will work towards the reduction of inequalities in health.

Finally, I would like to add another view on health promotion which often goes unstated. This concerns an essential characteristic of humane health and social policies. This is that, aside from imperatives to do with efficiency and productivity, societies and governments should promote and develop the ability of citizens to live healthy and long lives of quality. The ethical and philosophical foundations of the four broad aims of the World Health Organisation health for all strategy - equity in health, adding life to years, adding health to life, and adding years to life - all reflect a belief in maximising human potential. This means that governments have a responsibility to maximise the opportunities individuals and communities have to live satisfying disease-free and disability-free lives for as long as possible. This Government thoroughly endorses such an approach.

We believe in demonstrating our commitment to health promotion through real and practical support. My department already has a number of projects and health promotion services on offer to the ACT community through health advancement services and our regional community health centres. I should mention here, Mr Speaker, the Government's recent initiative of establishing the health promotion foundation which will be funded from an increase in tobacco tax in the ACT.

I am especially pleased and proud to be able to announce our participation in the exciting program I have announced. I feel sure that the national better health program will bring lasting benefits to the ACT community. There will be direct and immediate benefits to individuals and groups but, more importantly, there will be longer-term structural changes which will widen our health services to focus more on health promotion and illness prevention. These changes will also increase access of all social groups to a variety of health services. In this way we can look to a healthier environment and healthier living habits.

Through such changes, the cry of "health for all" by the year 2000 becomes a real goal, with a real chance of success. We in the ACT are only too pleased to play our part in this forward-looking program. Mr Speaker, I present the following paper:

National Better Health Program - Ministerial statement, 1 November 1989

and move:

That the Assembly takes note of the paper.

Debate (on motion by **Mr Humphries**) adjourned.

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INDUSTRY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM **Ministerial Statement and Paper**

MR WHALAN (Minister for Industry, Employment and Education), by leave: The 1989 ACT budget provides funds for new initiatives in the field of industry assistance. The purpose of the allocation is to provide assistance for new business activity in the ACT which meets stated government economic and development objectives.

Included in the budget statement was a specific reference to the establishment of a new program aimed at assisting the training and other human resource development programs of eligible companies. This and other funding for business development purposes will be associated with existing support for industry, such as direct land purchase and ACT participation in the Commonwealth-State national industry extension service. They will form a new, coordinated ACT industry assistance program.

The new program will be developed and administered to avoid overlap with other programs, including Commonwealth government programs aimed at improving productivity, investment and exports. The ACT Government is committed to a commercial and industry development strategy which will assist in developing a community based on social justice and economic security.

We are committed to the growth and diversification of the Territory's industrial base. This Government welcomes new business investment which produces employment and exports, which complements the Territory's unique economy and environment, and which makes the best use of the skills and talents of the people of the ACT.

Suitable businesses are being encouraged to locate in the ACT, and existing ACT firms are being encouraged to diversify their investment in the Territory. The industry assistance program will provide a range of assistance measures to eligible businesses. Some of these include: assistance with the one-off costs of establishing a new business activity in the Territory; assistance with analysis of training needs, work design and other aspects of human resource development; market and feasibility studies; the direct purchase of land; and assistance with strategic and business planning and improved enterprise efficiency.

The program aims to provide carefully targeted and evaluated assistance to selected firms which have something to contribute to the ACT economic base. The program dovetails with linked Commonwealth industry assistance programs and does not attempt to compete dollar for dollar with incentives which are provided by other State and local governments. The ACT Government does not have the resources for this type of approach.

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Businesses which will be eligible for assistance under the program will be those which are judged to be able to provide sustainable and diversified employment, particularly for the target groups identified in the Government's social justice strategy.

They will be businesses which will provide an increase in the level of ACT exports and import replacement. They will introduce new skills or technology to the ACT. They will be businesses that are critical in the overall development of the private sector in the ACT.

The type and level of assistance offered to successful applicants will be tailored to the particular needs of the business undertaking the investment and to the potential contribution of the investment project to the ACT economy.

All industries are eligible for assistance. However, industries which are particularly suited to the ACT are advanced technology and other high value added export industries; tourism; finance; business and personal services; and the broader services sector.

Two broad streams of new assistance will be funded through the budget allocation. Business development assistance will be available for such measures as the purchase and installation of essential new plant and equipment, market and feasibility studies and for other one-off establishment costs. Work force development assistance will provide assistance with analysis of training needs, recruitment and transfer of key staff and other aspects of human resources development.

For marketing purposes, these new assistance elements will be packaged with existing forms of incentives and assistance - direct land purchase and the national industry extension service. The program will be vigorously marketed as part of an enhanced marketing effort by the Office of Industry and Development, emphasising the ACT's many natural advantages for business and investment. Public guidelines will be issued for the program.

These guidelines, currently being finalised, will provide prospective applicants with the objectives of the program, details of the types of assistance available and information on how to apply for assistance. Each application for assistance will be assessed on its merits according to the capacity of the business and the project to contribute to the objectives of the program.

A confidential register and individual records will be kept of all applications for assistance, assessments of those applications, agreements entered into for the payment of assistance, payments made to any party as a part of any package of assistance and any follow-up action taken to verify that assistance has been used for agreed purposes.

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Agreements entered into with successful applicants may include projected payment over more than one financial year. Prudential arrangements will be established, which protect the public interest. We will ensure that the program is conducted openly and accountably and that details of assistance provided to companies will be either publicly revealed or, if commercially sensitive information is involved, discussed with party leaders.

All assistance packages will be approved by the Government on the recommendation of an advisory committee comprising representatives from peak industry bodies with relevant financial and business expertise and senior government officials. Assistance will be provided to a business only when it can be demonstrated that the ACT Government will not be duplicating assistance being provided by other ACT or Commonwealth government programs.

The program will be managed and its performance appraised according to the objectives of the program. It will be evaluated on an ongoing basis, and results will be reported in the annual report of the Office of Industry and Development, which will administer the program. The yearly disbursement of funds under the program will be included in that report.

It is proposed that an independent review of the program's effectiveness and management will be conducted during its third year of operation. The industry assistance program will be a key element in the Government's ACT industry strategy, a strategy which will set the direction for future economic and industrial development in the Territory, a strategy that sees us encouraging continued investment in employment-creating industries in the ACT.

This Government is committed to sound, sustainable economic development while at the same time adhering to the principles of social justice. It is our belief that the industry assistance program will attract businesses which will diversify the ACT's private sector and thereby the Territory's employment and revenue base. The program will build on the ACT's strengths as a regional and national growth centre for particular industries and promote the international competitiveness of ACT business through enterprise improvement. I look forward to reporting on the success of the program in this Assembly next year.

I present the following paper:

Industry assistance program - Ministerial statement, 1 November 1989

and move:

That the Assembly takes note of the paper.

Debate (on motion by **Mr Kaine**) adjourned.

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OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY - SELECT COMMITTEE Report

MR STEFANIAK, by leave: In relation to this, it came to my attention and, I think, that of the other members of the committee after the report was released that in chapter 5 on training there were some inaccuracies in what was recorded there and what is the wish of industry, business, employers, employees and unions in relation to training. In the report, the committee stated that it believed that both the ACT Institute of TAFE and TUTA, the Trade Union Training Authority, should be accredited to conduct training programs for health and safety representatives and for the members of health and safety committees, and that employers should be able to choose to which organisations they send their employees for training. That appears at 5.4.

The recommendations that were made by the committee included:

That the Occupational Health and Safety Council consider, in detail;

- (a) the provision of health and safety training programs by both the ACT Institute of TAFE and the Trade Union Training Authority; and
- (b) the appropriate means of funding such courses.

That was carried over on page 16 of the report in recommendation 8. As a result of approaches made by employers, employer bodies and trade unions, it is the general view of the entire sector there, both unions and employers, that the provision of health and safety training programs be certainly discussed and looked at by the safety council but that it not be restricted to just the ACT Institute of TAFE and the Trade Union Training Authority.

The legislation that currently exists in the Act that was passed last night does not specify any particular authority; it leaves it general. Nor indeed were there any amendments in relation to the recommendations of the committee. But I feel it is important to put on the record and also formally to advise the Government that all parties concerned do not want training restricted to those two bodies. Accordingly, the recommendation in relation to that can be deleted from the Government's consideration of the committee's report. When you get people as diverse as Charlie McDonald and Bob Winnel agreeing on the same point, it is very much unanimous agreement, Mr Speaker.

SCRUTINY OF BILLS AND SUBORDINATE LEGISLATION - STANDING COMMITTEE

MS MAHER, by leave: I wish to inform the Assembly that the committee met yesterday and I was elected chairman. My colleague Mr Collaery was elected deputy chair, and Mr

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Stefaniak is the other member. I would like to say that I am most disappointed that the standing orders do not allow for the appointment of two deputy chairs, as it would have been most appropriate with this committee.

Mr Speaker, I wish to take this opportunity to thank Senator Margaret Reid, who invited the committee to meet with members of the Federal Senate Standing Committee on the Scrutiny of Bills, and also Senator Barney Cooney for receiving us this morning and for being most helpful. It has been brought to the committee's attention that we have an enormous and very time consuming task ahead of us. It is extremely important for the efficient running of this Assembly that this committee operate from day one in an efficient and proper manner, not on an ad hoc basis.

I hereby give notice to the Government and you, Mr Speaker, that this means that it is essential that this committee be provided with the necessary administrative requirements to do so. By this, I am referring to the fact that it is essential that a full-time secretariat be appointed to the committee. This was brought out loudly and clearly during this morning's discussions with the Senate Standing Committee and also its adviser Professor Whalan. I would like to say on behalf of myself and the other members of the committee that we are looking forward to the challenging task ahead of us.

GOVERNMENT'S APPROACH TO THE FUTURE OF PRESCHOOLS **Discussion of Matter of Public Importance**

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

The Labor Government's confused and inept approach to the future of ACT preschools.

MR HUMPHRIES (3.38): Mr Speaker, in the short time I have been involved in public life in the ACT I have come to appreciate just how fiercely Canberra parents value their preschools. Therefore, it is somewhat astonishing that today I find it necessary to bring this Government to task for the appalling fear and confusion it has created over the future of preschools in this Territory. I give notice now that I will be moving a motion, which will be distributed shortly to members, which will outline, I believe, and express clearly the concerns I know will be voiced today by members of the Assembly in the area of preschool education and will send, in a way which an MPI by itself cannot do, a clear message to the Government concerning the wishes of this Assembly with regard to the future conduct of preschool education in the Territory.

Mr Speaker, this Government is seeking to make savings in the area of preschool education. I want to put on record

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that I do not object to that per se. This was an area which was specifically identified by the Commonwealth Grants Commission as being "overserviced", and it is an area which I believe a government legitimately should consider for that purpose.

However, the Government deserves to be brought to task for two reasons: first of all, the way in which it has broken its clear election commitments to the people of Canberra, and, secondly, the totally inept handling of the closure issue.

I want to deal first of all with the issue of election commitments. In the policy document released by Rosemary Follett on 14 February this year, called Policies for a Fairer Canberra, the Labor Party pledged:

In general, no school will be closed or amalgamated unless the school community agrees.

The policy goes on to say:

If circumstances arise where the educational viability of a school due to significantly declining numbers needs to be examined, we will ensure thorough and genuine consultation with the community, based on recognised procedures. We are serious about our policy of participation.

It sounds wonderful, does it not? Mr Speaker, these comments are made in respect of schools. It crossed my mind to wonder whether they applied also to preschools. I have come to the view that the Government clearly meant them to apply to preschools. First of all, the Government has reiterated on several occasions its belief that preschool education is part of the education system; it is not merely child minding, and with respect I endorse that view.

Secondly, the Minister, in answer to a question I asked last week, was unable to provide the Assembly with any clear distinction between schools and preschools in this regard. Thirdly, the Government has repeated on many occasions its view that consultation is a very important issue with respect to preschools. I accept, therefore, that this was a reference to its policy of not closing preschools or schools unless school communities agree. Perhaps the Minister can make that crystal clear when speaking in this debate, in a way in which he was not able to do last week.

Preschool communities were assured by the Labor Party that no school would close or be amalgamated without their expressed agreement. They were told that, if numbers declined significantly, thorough and genuine consultation would take place. The Labor Party also pledged itself to abolishing the \$6 a week preschool fee "guaranteeing that there is no loss to the education budget as a result". The

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policy also said that Labor is committed to maximising preschool attendance.

These, Mr Speaker, were the undertakings made by the ALP to the Canberra community before the last election. I think parents could be forgiven for voting for the ALP over, for example, the Liberal Party if their principal concern was to get a higher standard of education in the Territory. Frankly, the ALP outbid us in this area and went to greater lengths to ensure that the vote of the education electorate, if you like, was sewn up.

You can imagine, Mr Speaker, how the preschool community felt only a few months later when the Education Department sent a minute to the five area preschool advisory groups telling them that five part-time preschools would have to close. In particular, Belconnen south, central Canberra and Woden-Weston preschools were required to reduce the number of single part-time preschools by two, two, and one, respectively.

I asked the Minister in the course of the Estimates Committee hearings a few weeks ago whether this idea was definite, and I was told that the idea was still in an early stage, that the letters sent out were basically exploratory letters, and that consultation was an essential part of the process before any decision was going to be made.

I want to quote from the minute that the Education Department sent out in respect of those comments and ask members of the Assembly to judge for themselves just how much they think those comments were meant to be provisional or exploratory. It states:

To achieve this a reduction of 1.0 full-time equivalent teaching position will need to be made.

This was in respect of the Belconnen south area preschool for 1990. It continued:

In addition to achieve the expenditure reductions from the amalgamation of part-time units as outlined in the Budget it will be necessary to close two single part-time units in Belconnen South.

I repeat that:

It will be necessary to close two single part-time units in Belconnen South.

It does not sound very provisional or exploratory to me; it sounds like a decision has been made: there will be two closures. Mr Speaker, the Labor Minister for Education basically is responsible for that minute because it was his department that sent it out. But it is the same Minister who is supposedly responsible and bound by the election

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commitments made by the Chief Minister during the recent campaign.

These advisory groups were not only told that five preschools would have to close; they were also told that they - not the Government but the advisory groups - would have to nominate the schools which were to be closed. Members of the Assembly may have seen a movie which appeared a few years ago - I am sure Dr Kinloch would recall it - called *Sophie's Choice*. In that movie there was a scene, a very poignant scene, in which Sophie, played by Meryl Streep, was asked to indicate which of her two children she wanted to keep and which one was going to be taken away by a Gestapo officer.

Mr Speaker, it seems to me that the Minister in this case, like that Gestapo officer, is offering Sophie's choice to the preschools of this Territory. He has said, "I'm not going to provide you with any reasons; I'm not going to explain the criteria by which the decisions have been made in this respect; I'm not going to give you any of the forward population estimates on which the figures we say necessitate closing preschools are based; but you've got Sophie's choice: you've got to nominate which of your schools are going to close, and we'll see how the figures stack up in due course".

I find this tactic devious and unacceptable. It is not the hallmark of an honest and open government. Also I want to draw the Assembly's attention to the cloak of confusion which has been cast over this entire issue by the Government. The preschool community has been told one thing by the department, in particular by the chief education officer, and something totally different by the Minister.

How can the preschool community hope to defend its schools, which is its legitimate right, when the Minister keeps changing the ground rules? The preschool community has been receiving conflicting messages. In August a delegation from the Canberra Pre-school Society met with Dr Willmot to talk about the implications of the proposed budget cuts. The delegation leader who was then the president of the society, Mr Walter De Angeli - members will have spoken to him - insists that he was told by the department that no preschool in operation in 1989 would be amalgamated in 1990.

In early October this year the Belconnen south area preschool advisory group received the minute from which I have quoted, saying there would have to be two closures and one full-time teaching position would be shed. No alternatives were addressed and the decision as to which preschools would close was left, as I said, to the advisory group. The minutes said the final recommendations should be made to the department by 1 November, which is today.

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I do not know whether that has been done. What I do know, however, is that the leader of that Belconnen south area preschool advisory group, Mr Thompson, attempted to make an appointment with the Minister and was told that it would be some weeks, possibly not until next year, before he would be able to speak to the Minister.

If this was not bad enough, on 25 October the preschool community was surprised to hear the chief education officer give another very clear undertaking in regard to preschools. I know about that because I, like someone else in this chamber, was present at the time that commitment was made, at Hawker Primary School. Dr Willmot said no preschool with more than 17 students would be closed in 1990. Let me quote Dr Willmot's remarks to the meeting. He said:

The idea of closing viable preschools is nonsense. The Government of this State -
meaning the ACT -

has no intention of closing viable preschools.

He said further:

I do run the Department and I can assure you that the cut-off figure is 17.

There is, I understand, some dispute about whether or not those were the actual words spoken by Dr Willmot. I seek leave, Mr Speaker, to table a transcript of statements made by Dr Willmot at that public meeting on 25 October, from which those two quotes are taken and which indicated very clearly what it was Dr Willmot actually said on that day.

Leave granted.

MR HUMPHRIES: I understand that new enrolment figures are due out today, and I understand that on current figures the lowest enrolment of any school is at Yarralumla, where 18 children are enrolled. That, of course, might change with the new figures. It must be remembered that Yarralumla has places for a maximum of only 20 students. In other words, it is running at about 90 per cent of its capacity, notwithstanding the fact that it is the lowest enrolled preschool. In other words, unless drops occur in the number of enrolments, the chief education officer's promise effectively amounts to a ruling out of any preschool closures in 1990.

The chief education officer and the Government appear to be very sure of one thing, and that is that some preschools will be closed, because apparently they have figures which are not available to the rest of us. If that is the case, I would like to see them. I would like the Minister, in the course of this debate - and I assume he will be speaking in the course of this debate - to table those figures.

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With those words of the chief education officer from 25 October fresh in my mind, the next day I attended a rally outside this place at which the Minister distanced himself from comments made by his chief education officer. The Minister told the rally that an enrolment of 17 or more students was only one criterion for preschool viability and that overservicing of preschools in the Belconnen area had to be addressed. He said that two viable preschools had to close in the Belconnen south area because current department census figures showed there were 80 vacancies in the area.

I am a bit puzzled, Mr Speaker, because figures are also available which indicate that there are some 53 vacancies in the four preschools in the Belconnen south area which are not targeted for closure. I have a document here which purports to show both the total capacity of preschools and the current number of children enrolled in those preschools in the Belconnen south area and also vacancies. It is curious that the schools that have been mentioned for possible closure have quite low vacancy rates but the schools with high vacancy rates are not targeted for closure. Something does not quite add up.

Things became further complicated last Sunday when the Canberra Times quoted Dr Willmot as saying that areas with "number problems" had to do something about it. They had a choice of options, and one of those options was reducing full-time preschools to part-time preschools. Yet that minute of 6 October, from which I have already quoted, said that the only option was to close two part-time preschools - no ifs, no buts; close two part-time preschools.

I can well understand the chief education officer being quoted in the Canberra Times on the 28th of last month as saying:

We have allowed pre-school operation to become so complicated no bugger can understand it.

Those comments are quite understandable, Mr Speaker. There are two possible explanations for this Government's behaviour: either they have spun a deliberate web of deception designed to confuse and mislead the opponents of preschool closures or the Government has demonstrated appalling and inexcusable incompetence in this area. It is very clear that the Government is attempting to save money and it wants to identify overservicing and act accordingly.

But how much will the Government save by closing down five preschools? A mere \$56,000. It is a pretty small amount. I cannot understand why the Minister and his chief education officer have caused so much bad will within the community over such a trifling sum. I could see distinct advantages for keeping small preschools open. Let us face it, part-time preschools provide places for a maximum of 25

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children. If you have two shifts, in a full-time preschool you have a total of 50.

It is important, Mr Speaker, that children have access to preschool places. It is important for reasons of social justice that these preschools are located close to the homes of the families that use them. (Extension of time granted)

Closing preschools will disadvantage the less affluent families and is likely to put preschools beyond the reach of some parents. For example, a family without a car or with only one car which is tied up by a working parent could be forced to put a four-year-old on a bus in order for him or her to attend preschool. The key to effective provision of preschool education is to ensure that preschools are readily accessible by the community. By creating fewer preschools the Government is placing preschool education out of the reach of some people. I am quoting this back against the existing ALP policy in this regard.

The ALP talks about things like special needs. It talks about participation in preschools. How are the special needs of four-year-olds who cannot get to preschools because they are out of range of their homes to be met, Education Minister? I look forward to an interesting answer. It makes a mockery of the Government's commitment to social justice; it makes a mockery of its commitment to maximising preschool attendance; and it makes a mockery of its pledge to provide preschool places for all children 12 months prior to their entry to school.

In fact, by planning to downgrade the availability of facilities in anticipation of an expected decline in enrolments, this Government is actively discouraging preschool attendance. Indeed, by speculating and naming preschools that might be forced to close under this system, it is effectively closing some preschools by a process of speculation. Parents of children who are in schools that might be closed, who hear they might be closed, naturally try to get their children into other surrounding preschools in order to avoid the rush out of those preschools. That, by itself, tends to affect schools by causing them to be closed.

The Government is not only breaking its election commitment but it is actually following a policy of minimising preschool attendance. This is unacceptable. I believe it is unacceptable to the community as a whole. Obviously there is some level at which preschools are not viable. If the chief education officer has said a school with 17 enrolments is viable and will not be closed, then I think this Government should accept that advice and give an unequivocal commitment that an enrolment of 17 students will guarantee that that school or preschool remains open.

I would like to remind Assembly members of remarks made by the Chief Minister during preschool week in May. She was

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quoted in the Canberra Times as saying that her Government's support for preschool education was "unequivocal" because of its positive role in children's schooling. She went on:

I hope that now we have settled some of the difficulties of the past year -

referring, of course, to the \$6 preschool fee fight -

we can find constructive ways to work together to keep our pre-school system a strong one.

I wonder, Mr Speaker, whether the Chief Minister will contribute to this debate. If she does, I would like her to explain how the sorry saga I outlined earlier can possibly constitute constructive ways of working together.

As I mentioned, Mr Speaker, I will be moving a motion at the end of this to indicate clearly what it is that the Government ought to do in this regard. I believe the Government should not be allowed to establish an unacceptable standard of behaviour in its dealings with community groups. The motion I will be moving will bring it to task for its inept and deceptive handling of the preschool closure debate, and I look forward to the support of other members in this chamber.

DR KINLOCH (3.57): Firstly, I thank Mr Humphries for his long, complex, interesting and well-stated comments which I think are especially welcome from a disinterested bachelor. I speak as one who had three children at Ainslie, at Baker Gardens preschool, and who much appreciated that experience for our family, both the children and parents.

I would like to begin with the question of consultation, which Mr Humphries has already raised. I have been assured by one of the leaders of the preschool rally outside the Assembly last week that one of their problems has been the lack of consultation. That was the message I received from talking to a number of people who were standing out in the courtyard.

I well recognise that members of the Schools Authority staff have considered the matter of the closing of several preschools and the elimination of several preschool jobs. They were probably under orders to find ways to cut costs, given a range of such cuts across the board. Possibly those Macarthur House administrators are now looking at ways to consult parents at Cook, Weetangera, Page, Scullin, Macquarie and Hawker, but such consultation may come too late. I hope it will not be too late, and I look forward to hearing from members of the Government about that, that it will not be too late. So, no matter what are the rights and wrongs of each individual situation at each school, that consultation must now take place.

I do recognise that, if a preschool were down to one, two or three children, there would be a need for revised arrangements, but that is not what we see.

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A member: What if there were four?

DR KINLOCH: I do have a comment later about figures, Mr Speaker, and I do note the figures given by Mr Humphries. We now come to what are the conditions which are appropriate for the closing of a preschool. The first is if the actual school building is so decrepit or even dangerous that it would not be safe for children to go there. That is not the case in any of those schools. The second is if there are inadequately trained teachers and aids - that is, if the number of preschool teachers is not sufficient to staff the schools. That is not the case here. The third is if parents, themselves, decide against preschool education. I met one such young couple at a conference at Parliament House on Monday. Both father and mother, with three young children, argued that they wished to keep their children at home, but I found that a very unusual case. That is not the usual case at all. It is certainly not the case here. Again, to refer back to that rally in the courtyard, there were many parents there who were very anxious indeed to have their children in preschools.

The fourth thing is that, if we had the kind of government in the ACT which wished to go back on almost a hundred years of preschool and kindergarten education, then one could understand this need to close preschools. But that is not the case here. No-one in this Assembly - not anyone from any of our six groups - would wish to turn the clock back to 1896 when the Kindergarten Union of New South Wales was formed, or even to 1938, the year of the founding of the Australian Pre-School Association, when everything was voluntary and fee paying.

We have come a long way since then. Indeed we now wish to build on and go beyond the 1972 Child Care Act which provided Federal funding for capital expenses and subsidies for teachers' salaries. Indeed in this Territory we really have done very well in this area of preschool education, and we all, of course, rejoice at the ending of preschool fees. So we surely want to ensure preschool involvement at the local level in the immediate neighbourhood - I stress, in the immediate neighbourhood - of all children in the ACT.

In relation to the fifth condition, we come then to the question of numbers. What is the magic number at which we say that a school is not viable? Is it 25, the maximum allowed size, possibly, or 17, that mystical number that is so important in this Assembly, or 10 or 5 or what? At what point do we say to mothers with toddlers that they have to find themselves transport to leave their suburb and deposit their children several kilometres away and then have to repeat that journey later in the day? One of the people from the preschool group to whom I spoke suggested that under one circumstance some parents, whichever parent did it, would have to take the child three and a half kilometres to school and back on that day.

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So, as we come to that question of numbers, I would like to urge the following points. Firstly, there is the especially crucial factor of neighbourhood - at that level of schooling - for the parent. The parent is usually a woman, often with no car at that stage of her life, and on one income. That is, we are asking people who are in the greatest difficulties to bear considerable costs and considerable disadvantages.

Let me go back to the experience at Baker Gardens preschool, when my wife was at home. It was so important that while I was at work - she was working, of course - she was walking the child around the corner, down the street a couple of blocks to the Baker Gardens preschool. She did not have transport; there was no bus between our house and the Baker Gardens preschool. So I stress that especially crucial factor of neighbourhood.

Then there is the especially crucial factor of neighbourhood, not for the parent - not for the mother - but for the child. There is the chance for the child to walk with his or her parents around the corner and a few blocks away with a sense of the joy of place plus the new joy of education.

In this connection there is a third point. I would like to note the area of special education in which the staff to student ratio is very favourable. I would want to argue that the staff to student ratio in preschools also ought to be very favourable. This is a student's first experience of education. It is so important that they get this wonderful start at age three or four, or whatever age they arrive at that preschool, so that school becomes a joy; it becomes a joy in their neighbourhood; it becomes a joy for the family; not some great chore to which some parent will object and where the child is dumped several kilometres away because a school was closed.

So there is a very special need, a very special benefit, for small, intimate classes at that beginning point of the educational process. That must be, for the administrators of these proposals, a very high concern.

Now to the particular question of size. What is an optimum number? I want now to refer to a program in the United States. I am indebted in this connection to Mrs Faye Dockrill who, while a part-time student at the ANU, wrote her BA honours thesis in the history department on the headstart program. While doing so, she had several tiny ones of her own.

The headstart program came in the early 1960s out of the so-called Great Society and Lyndon Johnson's administration. The whole notion was that by the time children from deprived areas - black children, Puerto Rican children, et cetera - got to primary school they were already one, two or three years behind. They were not just

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years behind but also emotionally and psychologically behind because they had not had the chance of that kind of preschool education.

It was a United States Government program that helped prepare preschool children of poor families for the experience of school. Local communities throughout the country operated these headstart centres, which have been going ever since. They work to provide activities to stimulate emotional, intellectual, physical and social growth. The program was administered by the office of human development services of the US Department of Health and Human Services.

In this headstart service, volunteers and parents played a considerable role. The parents themselves were involved, and they served on parent policy committees with representatives of community groups and professional organisations. We ask for this same kind of concern as people are consulted about their local preschools in the ACT. They provided a preschool educational program, lunches and snacks, medical, dental and mental health services, and social services for the children's families.

I now want to come to the optimum size that was recommended for the headstart program. This is the figure there. Again, it is so difficult to know what is the most accurate figure or the best figure or the optimum figure. In the headstart service, most groups consist of 15 children and three adults.

Now I am not saying the headstart program has to be copied - not at all - but it is interesting, is it not, that over that long period headstart has come to see that about 15 children is a special optimum for these kinds of conditions? The three adults in each case are a teacher, a teacher aid and a volunteer. The adults involve the youngsters in all the usual activities - field trips, language development, music, science and so forth.

So, in coming to this question of preschools and the closing of preschools, I would again urge this absolutely crucial nature of neighbourhood. To be sure, if you start looking at figures on paper and you see 22 here or 19 there, it looks as though if you add them together and make a bigger school it would be good for the budget. It may be, but it may not be good for the children. It may not be good for those preschool children.

I want to urge that these children deserve very special attention. Other areas might need to be looked at, and that would create other problems, I realise. A final thing here is that we are also involving parents often in their first experience with the educational process. These parents are at the stage at which they are becoming keen about their children's education at this preschool level. They are the ones who are going to be in the parents and citizens groups all through school, as many of us have

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been. They start in those preschool areas and go on to the primary and secondary areas and to the colleges.

So here again one could argue that the neighbourhood preschool - I stress neighbourhood - is a special area not merely for the absolutely necessary training of these four-year-olds before they go on to school but also for the parents. It is at a time when it is more than likely that the parents are involved with heavy mortgages, are one-income families, with mothers who are trying to cope. I want to endorse this motion that Mr Humphries will be putting before us. I do believe the Government needs to look very carefully indeed at this crucial area. I look forward to seeing the motion put before the Assembly.

MR WHALAN (Minister for Industry, Employment and Education) (4.09): Mr Speaker, I would like to thank Mr Humphries for giving us this opportunity today to state once again - and on the public record - the Government's position in regard to the amalgamation of part-time preschools and the bright future of our excellent preschool system.

I wish to reiterate a statement which I made in this Assembly only last week. I challenge the assertion of Mr Humphries that his question in relation to this matter was not answered, and that relates to his allegation that we, the Labor Government, had in some way reneged on our promise not to close any schools.

We have not reneged, and we will not renege, on the undertaking that we gave not to close schools. It was absolutely essential that there be a distinction drawn between schools that form part of the schooling system of compulsory education and preschools that do not. That was the distinction that was clearly made.

Mr Humphries: Not last week, it wasn't.

MR WHALAN: The Government's commitment is to do with schools. Let me go on to say, however, Mr Speaker, that no government and certainly no Minister - and I include myself in that category - wants to be perceived as taking courses of action that upset the public. I can assure you that we would much rather be in a position to be able to hand out largess and spread good news.

Unfortunately, the harsh reality that faces us - and I am interested to know Dr Kinloch's thoughts on this matter - is that we are confronted by hard times. Things are not as bright as they may have been in the past, and the amount of money available to be spent on public services is less than what some elements of the community would perceive as being their right and the needs that are emerging within the community.

It is the fact that what we face in the ACT is a static school population and an expanding education system which follows the expansion of suburban development in the ACT.

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It is inevitable that in that situation, unless more money is going to be injected into the system, there has to be some rationalisation in those areas in which the school population is contracting.

So it was in this context that the ACT budget for 1989 had to be framed. We have to face the reality of life, and in that context funds available for recurrent expenditure were constrained by three important elements, Dr Kinloch. As much as you might like to have preschools with five children in them, I would submit to you that you have to face the harsh realities of cost.

You have to face the harsh requirement of the Government and the Department of Education to meet the needs of the people who live in the suburbs of Tuggeranong - the outer suburbs, the frontier suburbs of our city - as well as provide for those who live in the more comfortable and established suburb you know so well.

These constraints that exercised the mind of the Government were, first of all, the Commonwealth Government's position in relation to recurrent expenditure generally for States and territories. There was a general cutback, a general reduction, of 4.4 per cent in Commonwealth funding to the States. We were part of that process.

Secondly, as much as it hurts me to say it, I must admit that the Commonwealth Government failed to honour an undertaking which it had given in relation to maintaining the real level of expenditure in the ACT for a fixed period and, in the process of doing that, withheld from our Government \$22.7m which was rightfully ours and which should have been ours, available for the budget. The absence of it imposed constraints upon the Government's programs.

Finally, of course, we have the constraints of the Commonwealth Grants Commission and the commitment of the Commonwealth Government to ensure that no longer will the citizens of the ACT enjoy advantages over the other States in relation to expenditure. It is in this area that the Grants Commission perceived overexpenditure, and I will go to that now. So the Grants Commission did perceive that expenditure on preschooling in the ACT is in excess of the standard provision in other parts of Australia.

We, the Government, happen to believe that the excess provision for preschooling is justified, and certainly it is our intention to do all in our power to reverse the view of the Grants Commission in future. Early next year the next round of submissions to the Grants Commission will commence, and we will be placing particular emphasis on that.

However, the reality is that the budget savings are required in the education sector. All aspects of the Department of Education were scrutinised, as were other

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areas of government administration. Within the Department of Education several areas were identified in which savings could be achieved - let me emphasise, Mr Speaker, could be achieved - without affecting the quality of service provided to ACT students.

The preschool area was one of these areas in which savings could be achieved without reducing the general level of service to the community. It needs to be recognised that, even after the proposed savings have been achieved, some \$224,000 extra will be spent on preschool education in 1989-90 over 1988-89.

The original concept of amalgamation as a way of reducing expenditure this time was derived from the Chase review of 1989. The background to the Chase review is quite important because during the budget discussions the proposition was put forward from some sectors that were concerned about the Government's proposed expenditure savings in the education area that the people of Canberra were prepared to pay more than the people of other parts of Australia in order to have a superior education system.

The Chase committee had its origin directly as a result of that theory being tested. An opportunity was provided for people to pay more for preschool education, to cover the level of overfunding, and that was in the form of the \$6 a week preschool fee. We know the history of that. That proposal was rejected outright by the preschool community, and a very successful and effective campaign of boycotts was adopted. People were not prepared to pay for it. That is the reality.

This document came out of that situation. The members of the Chase committee included representatives of the Schools Authority, the ACT Administration, the Canberra Pre-School Society and the ACT Teachers Federation. There were five participants in the Chase committee review. I think it is important that the Chase committee made recommendations which were intended to realise some savings in preschool education without affecting the quality of preschool education, in an effort to achieve some of those savings required by the Grants Commission figures. Some of those proposals that came from the Chase committee were about the amalgamation of preschools. I would like to quote from pages 30 and 31 of that report. It states:

At present there are 17 part time single unit preschools in the ACT. These preschools have a maximum enrolment of 25 children each. There are also eight double unit preschools which have one vacant unit.

As the preschool population declines in some areas, the number of part time preschools and the number of vacant units will increase. While the operation of part time preschools means that there is easy access in all neighbourhoods, they do add

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significantly to the administrative workload of area preschools and to the cost.

(Extension of time granted)

Further, Parent Associations of single part time units have reported difficulty in raising the necessary funds to equip and clean the preschool.

The Committee has reached the conclusion that, given due regard to the ease of access consideration, there is a case for a number of existing single unit part time preschools to be amalgamated with a neighbouring preschool to create a full time unit.

Based on these recommendations of the Chase committee review, the Government has taken a decision to amalgamate some single unit preschools to achieve net savings. A consultative process was developed to ensure that the community was informed of the process by which this decision would be implemented. It should also be pointed out that amalgamation is not a new invention; it has been carried out in the past when enrolments have fallen in a number of locations. It has been the standard practice for the last eight years. The same procedure which is adopted at this moment is that which has been in existence for the last eight years.

Let me explain what happens in the preschool planning process and what has happened this year as far as consultation with the community is concerned. In July and August of each year an analysis of preschool enrolment projections is conducted, based on the information derived from the July census. It is on this basis that the annual management of preschool space process is conducted. In the past three years the department has made recommendations to the area preschool advisory groups about the management of preschool resources within an area for the following year. Area preschool advisory groups are then invited to submit additional information which may affect the mode of operation of individual preschool units, and this affects the department's final decision.

In this process advisory groups have tended to include all waiting list applications without taking into account those children who may have moved out of an area or those registered on more than one waiting list and who may then be counted at other preschool locations. Over many years the projected enrolments at the July census have been reliable. While there may be changes in the distribution of preschool enrolments across Canberra, the total enrolment figure in February each year is always very close to the projected enrolments at the July census.

In order to gain the most accurate information, area preschool principals have been asked to make offers of placement and receive confirmation of these by 1 November

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1989. Until this process has been completed the department will not be in a position to make final recommendations on the mode of operations of preschools for 1990. The consultative process in 1989 has followed this same sort of pattern. Following a meeting I had with the area preschool advisory group chairpersons in early September of this year, I asked the department to convene a meeting with the advisory group chairpersons to identify appropriate consultative processes related to the possible amalgamation of preschools. This stronger consultative role was due to their function as representatives of community opinion.

This meeting took place on Monday, 11 September 1989, to discuss the implementation of budget proposals affecting preschools. At this meeting a new approach to consultation on the annual review of management of space was agreed to. This was later confirmed in a letter of 27 September from preschool advisory committee groups to the chief education officer.

Under the agreed model an allocation of available resources would be made to each area preschool, and the advisory group chairperson would be appropriately informed. Advisory group chairpersons, in consultation with the area preschool principal and members of the advisory group, would then make recommendations on the distribution of these resources within the area. It was agreed that recommendations relating to the identification of part-time preschools to be amalgamated would be addressed in the consultative process.

Underpinning the decision making process are guidelines which have been used in the ACT for eight years. Under these guidelines two issues are dominant. These are, firstly, enrolment at an individual preschool and, secondly, regional capacity and vacancy rates consistent for eight years. Under the first guideline, if enrolment at any individual preschool falls below 17 that preschool is closed. However, the converse does not necessarily hold; enrolment at an individual preschool being above 17 does not automatically mean that it will stay open.

MR SPEAKER: Order! Minister, your time has expired. The only alternative is for you to suspend standing orders.

Mr Whalan: I will speak to the motion, Mr Speaker.

MR MOORE (4.25): I think we are going to have to be more careful with our times because, by extending the series of times, other people do not get the opportunity to speak. I shall be as brief as I can.

What we have seen after the last few years is what I perceive as a straight attack on the ACT preschool system. What we should be looking at is how we can find ways to expand our preschool system instead of ways of making it smaller; how we can get to more children and perhaps for longer times. These are what we should be looking at, not

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putting the preschools in a situation in which they appear always to be on the defence.

We have situations - and I have seen evidence of them - of manipulation of numbers in the preschools in an attempt to rearrange which preschools are vulnerable and which are not. That is done, on my understanding, through what Mr Whalan has just described as offers of placement and confirmation. I give credit to preschool principals for attempting to arrange their teachers and staff in the best possible way.

What it fails to understand is how important the individual preschools are to the community - and to the local community. That is one of the factors that we must take into account. It is one of the factors that my colleague Dr Kinloch has emphasised today, so I shall not go through it too much. Dr Kinloch referred to the headstart program, which I consider is unfortunate because I am going to refer to some of the others. I am going to quote from a paper entitled *Competence and Coping in Children* by Dr Kathy Sylva. It states:

Proponents of American Head Start programmes in the 60's and early 70's promised boldly that pre-school attendance would increase the 'life chances' of disadvantaged children by raising their intelligence, school attainment and self-concept.

She goes on later to say:

The first wave of evaluation studies were cheering, but soon came the disappointing 'wash-out' effects, notably those in Westinghouse Corporation ... study showing that the 'extra' skills of pre-school graduates had disappeared 3-4 years after leaving the programme. Hopes were dashed, funding was cut, and many psychologists began to question the view that early experiences are fixed forever ...

The new scepticism about the indelible stamp of early experiences brought a halt to pre-school expansion. As psychologists became more and more convinced of the plasticity and resilience of childhood ... they lost interest in early intervention. Worse still, policy-makers turned their attention to cost-cutting exercises, which often decreased pre-school provision.

I have not used this example to debunk Dr Kinloch. On the contrary, I think what has happened is that we have got to the stage in Canberra at which we have the same sort of situation. If we can just move ourselves out of that time warp into the more current thinking, we can have a look at what has come as a result of the Perry preschool experiment, which was part of the High Scope Research

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Foundation experiment, and here is a copy of that. I am going to quote now from a report by Carolyn Breedlove and Lawrence J. Schweinhart which clarifies some of the findings of that rather long and detailed report. It states under the heading "Economic Findings":

For every \$1,000 that was invested in the preschool program, at least \$4,130 (after inflation) has been ... returned to society.

So for economic reasons we should be supporting our preschool system and expanding it if possible.

Mr Wood: How did that happen?

MR MOORE: I will give you a copy of the report, and you can read it at length. It continues saying that delinquency findings show that, for every 100 with preschool education, 22 had been arrested by the age of 19; for every 100 with no preschool education, 43 had been arrested by the age of 19. Remember that this was in Michigan, and we are dealing with a particular group of people. So those were their delinquency findings. We would not expect those figures to be as high in Canberra, of course, but we can see that it does have an impact. Let me continue. I am quite happy to make this report available to anybody who would like to see it. The education findings showed that those with preschool education spent 1.8 - - -

Discussion interrupted.

ADJOURNMENT

MR SPEAKER: Order! It being 4.30 pm, I propose the question:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

Mr Whalan: I require the question to be put forthwith without debate.

Question resolved in the negative.

GOVERNMENT'S APPROACH TO THE FUTURE OF PRESCHOOLS Discussion of Matter of Public Importance

Discussion resumed.

MR MOORE: To continue, the education findings showed that those with preschool education spend 1.8 years in special education; those with no preschool education spend 3.8 years in special education. For every 100 with preschool education, 35 dropped out of high school; for every 100 with no preschool education, 55 dropped out of high school. For every 100 with preschool education, 38 attended colleges or job training courses; for every 100

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with no preschool education, 21 attended.

Employment findings showed that, for every 100 with preschool education, when the study was done 48 were currently employed; for every 100 with no preschool education, it was 29. For every 100 with preschool education, 45 supported themselves completely by their own or their spouses' earnings, and for every 100 with no preschool education it was 24.

So, whilst the psychologists were looking at IQ with the headstart program, had they studied some of the other effects on our society, they would have found a very, very different situation. To come back to Dr Kinloch's speech, the problem was not with the headstart program; it was with how people looked at it and how the study was carried out.

I am arguing that we have very, very good studies, very long and detailed studies - and they are called longitudinal studies - over a long time that give us a great deal of evidence that there is a considerable contribution that preschools can make to our society. That is what we should be supporting and not constantly putting under some form of attack.

I go back to referring to *Competence and Coping in Children* by Dr Kathy Sylva who is from the University of Oxford. She talked about research on the high scope, which is what I have referred to, and she said:

The High/Scope message is simple but powerful: Pre-school education for disadvantaged children is a wise financial investment. Weikart and his colleagues have prepared a cost-benefit analysis.

Then she went to some of the things about which I have spoken, and she summarised it as follows:

On the basis of these painstaking studies we must relinquish once and for all blind optimism about the mystical effects of early experience; even the best programmes did little to raise IQs over the long run or indeed to make startling difference in reading or maths scores. What they did do is to demonstrate that early education can have lasting impact on raising functional competence. Although pre-school experience cannot turn all disadvantaged children into university scholars, it can prevent school failures, improve job chances, and decrease delinquency and need for support from social services.

I had intended to talk about the Oxford study but, because of time, I shall not do that. The Australian Bureau of Statistics projections for the year 2006 put Canberra's

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population at 450,000, yet we see projections again and again for decreases in school population. I believe that in some way or other we are being snowed. I do not know how it is. I am still looking at it, and I hope to find out.

Let me take you now quickly to part-time preschools. The most important factor that many people are missing about our part-time preschools is the access they give parents. I will, for one moment, be anecdotal. I was at home, with a small child and isolated. I can tell you that if you have been a man at home with a baby you would know how isolation feels. I have a great deal of empathy with parents who are in the outer suburbs feeling that same sort of isolation.

The local preschool is a community spot where mums or parents can meet and deal with the sorts of problems that a modern parent - I suppose there have been parents for a long time - has. It provides a facility that goes well beyond preschool education. The important part there is the local preschool. We have to be careful to ensure that whatever amalgamations take place we do not remove the notion of a local preschool.

MRS NOLAN (4.34): I am aware of the time so I shall be brief. I would like to say at the outset that, unlike Mr Humphries, I did not have to wait until I was involved in public life to realise how much value Canberra parents place on their preschools. However, like Dr Kinloch, I commend a bachelor for his actions.

As a mother of two school age children, both of whom have been through their preschool education in Canberra, I fully understand the concerns, especially as during my first year in Canberra I drove - I was lucky enough to have a car - my son from Chapman to preschool in Deakin, four days a week. This was because we arrived in Canberra in late January and the local preschool was already fully booked.

As I said, Mr Speaker, this was not because of closures but because of my late arrival in the city. I am sure that I, more than anyone in this house, fully understand how parents value local preschools. I might add that while driving my son to preschool, I also had a young daughter to contend with. In fact, she was three weeks old when we arrived in the city. My sympathies go out to those mums who have had to cope with some distances between preschool and home.

Preschool education has been handled very badly by this Government, both in the lead-up to the election on 4 May and since, and the title of this matter of public importance, "The Labor Government's confused and inept approach to the future of ACT preschools", is certainly a good description. As Mr Humphries has already said, the Labor Party promised on 14 February, and I quote:

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In general, no school will be closed or amalgamated unless the school agrees.

School, preschool - it is all part of the child's education. Mr Humphries has already gone on and quoted further from that statement and I will not continue with that. However, the parents of children in those five preschools that the Department of Education has written to would, I am sure, agree totally with our concerns today. I am sure also that parents of young children, people without children and grandparents all share our concerns; in fact, the whole community is concerned.

Mr Speaker, the other fundamental question that needs to be addressed is just who is responsible for the decisions that are being taken. The chief education officer says one thing and the Minister says another. I would like to quote from a press release from Belconnen Preschool Action. It certainly sums the situation up very well. It is headed "Dr Willmot deceives Preschool Parents and his Minister". It goes on to say:

At a public meeting held on Wednesday night Dr Eric Willmot, Chief Education Officer for the ACT stated: "The idea of closing viable preschools is nonsense. The Government of this State, the ACT, has no intention of closing viable preschools". Dr Willmot pledged that no preschool with more than 17 students would be closed next year.

MR SPEAKER: Order! The time for this discussion has expired.

GOVERNMENT'S POLICY ON PRESCHOOLS

MR HUMPHRIES, by leave: I move:

That this Assembly -

- (1) notes that ACT Labor Party policy states that: "In general, no school will be closed or amalgamated unless the school community agrees";
- (2) notes with concern the damaging speculation surrounding Government plans to close preschools in Canberra despite strong opposition from preschool communities and the ACT community in general;
- (3) notes with concern the conflicting information regarding preschool closures and amalgamations provided by the Minister for Education and his chief education officer; and
- (4) urges the Labor Government to end speculation of this kind by immediate publication of its criteria for preschool closures and by entering into full and real consultation with affected preschool communities.

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I think that the debate we have already had on this matter sums up quite well the thrust of the arguments supporting the motion that appears before members now. I only want to make a couple of brief points in this regard.

I was very pleased to see that the Government has admitted finally and clearly that, for the purposes of the promises made on 14 February this year, preschools are not schools and will not receive the same benefit of the promise not to close them unless the preschool community agrees. I am pleased that we have at last got a clear answer to that. But I want to reject completely and totally the assertion made by the Minister and confirmed by the Chief Minister in the course of the debate just past, that in some way this has already been made clear by the Government. It has not been made clear.

The Chief Minister in particular referred to the question I asked last week in which I sought a simple answer to that question. I think this is worth quoting back because I know the Chief Minister and others frequently rise in this place and indignantly explain to you, Mr Speaker, that the questions that have been asked from this side of the chamber have indeed been answered. That cry is often heard from the Chief Minister particularly, but the fact is it is rarely true.

I want to quote from the question and answer on 26 October in which that point was made very clear. I asked the Minister:

Will the Minister confirm that this principle -

that is the one we have been debating today, that preschools will not close unless the school community agrees -

applies to preschools, and will he confirm that no preschool will close unless the preschool community agrees?

The Minister replied:

There are a number of distinctions between preschool education and early childhood education in the schooling system as it is presently structured.

He went on with a page of, with respect, irrelevancies in this regard. Half-way through that page I took a point of order. I explained that the Minister was not addressing the question I had asked. You, in your great wisdom, Mr Speaker, asked the Minister to answer the question. The Minister thanked you. He then went on to say, in much the same vein, that the essential distinction between preschool education and schools is that they are different management systems. He further said:

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As to the question of consultation in relation to closures or amalgamations, the Government is committed to consultation.

He then went on to mention the Chase committee report. I want to remind members that my question was whether he would confirm that no preschool would close unless the preschool community agreed. That was a very simple question. It was not complex. It could easily have been answered with a yes or a no. But the house has heard what he said in response to that. He went on further. Mr Collaery then took a point of order, saying that "yes" or "no" would suffice. Again he continued and said, "I will finish, Mr Speaker".

I asked as a supplementary question whether the Minister would confirm that no preschool will close unless the preschool community agrees. The Minister said:

I have quoted to you the approach to this matter which has been recommended by the Chase committee report. The Chase committee report is quite clear. It has recommended an approach to this matter, and in relation to the amalgamations of preschools that is the course which not only do we intend to adopt but which we are adopting at this moment.

That is what the Minister said. There was no answer to that question there, and there has been no answer to the question I asked until today.

I want to place on record the fact that, quite frankly, there is a limit to the tolerance of the opposition. Ministers simply refuse to answer questions. That is what it amounts to - a refusal to answer questions. So, as I said, I am pleased to see that the Government has at last clearly provided an answer to that question. I will certainly be communicating that answer to members of preschool societies and the preschool communities, but I indicate quite clearly that it is very important for the Assembly to pass this motion today conveying in no uncertain terms our view - that is, the Assembly's view - of how the Government ought to proceed with the handling of this issue, how it ought to clear up the ambiguities, doubts and fears which have been generated in the preschool communities, by stating clearly and unequivocally its position with respect to preschools and how it is going to proceed.

MR WOOD (4.43): I could spend my time, along with others, telling the Assembly how wonderful our preschools are and what great things go on in them. In the 10 minutes I have I could say how important or how necessary they are for the development of the young children who attend them. I could even get a little anecdotal, too, and tell members about some of the very enjoyable experiences I have had in our

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preschools. But I am not going to do that. I am going to spend just a little time telling the Assembly how this Government is going to keep the preschools that way, and how this Government is going to ensure that people like Mrs Nolan and Mr Jensen, down in the depths of Tuggeranong, are going to be able to enjoy for their children, and the community that Mr Moore was talking about, the preschools that we will be putting there.

This motion is essentially about planning. Therefore, I will talk to that. No matter how important it is to send our children to preschool and how valuable it is to their education, I will stay away from that and talk about the planning matters.

Let me say first of all that there is a clear distinction between schools and preschools. Perhaps because I have worked in this area in a variety of capacities for a long time, I tend to take for granted that fact that there is a distinction. Perhaps not everybody else appreciates it. The clearest way of expressing that distinction is that preschools are the non-compulsory part of our early education system. Children do not have to go there - - -

Mrs Nolan: So are colleges, but they are absolutely essential.

MR WOOD: Agreed. I am not arguing on that point at all. That is why we want to get them down to you in Tuggeranong, because they are very important. The school sector is, of course, compulsory - certainly up to the age of 15. I want to reinforce all that the Minister has had to say on this matter. Preschools in the ACT are being managed in an efficient and effective way. Furthermore, the future of ACT preschools will be guaranteed to meet the needs of all parents through the various planning and consultative processes now in place. We need to plan; that is what has sparked this debate. If we did not plan, if we let things drift, then we could be accused of ineptness, as the motion asserts. That is the time when we would be in trouble. But because the Government is planning, there will be these sound facilities right through Canberra.

The ACT has a system of preschools that is unique in Australia. It has long been the best system of preschool education that could be found anywhere in the country. Still, today, there are more government preschools in the ACT per capita than there are in other parts of Australia. Indeed, in simple numbers, there are more preschools in the ACT than there are government primary schools, that being because of the very important neighbourhood approach, the community aspect.

The preschool system was developed as part of a drive to attract young families to settle in the ACT in the 1940s. In 1945 the model, then as now, was that of a partnership between government, parents and community groups, and that is still the case because the parents in our preschools

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provide very much more personalised services in those preschools than they do later on when their children go to primary and secondary schools. So a first-rate system developed, a system that is the envy of other States.

But, of course, we have to face up to reality, and just as we have to get buses and other community facilities down to Tuggeranong, so we have to get preschools down there too. The preschool area has been faced not only with declining enrolments for some years but also with enrolments spreading wider. There are inevitable consequences of that. This decline is no doubt the consequence of a general slowing down of the birthrate, especially in the ACT, but there are also other factors at work. We have to recognise that nothing ever stays the same, therefore our system of preschools cannot ever stay the same. We have to adjust to meet the changing circumstances.

Preschools, as they are presently organised, are not always a convenient option for working mothers with young children, as the hours of operation of preschools do not always coincide with normal working hours. It is a fact that most women now work. Members will know - those who are involved with young children - that there is a complex arrangement of child-care before, during and after school and preschool hours. This matter is currently under close consideration by the Education Department to see how it can best accommodate to the needs imposed by these changes.

As well, and of particular note, is the fact that families with young children tend not to live in the old established areas, but to settle in the new growth areas such as Tuggeranong. I understand that during the last 10 years many adjustments and amalgamations have taken place as a result of these demographic trends. It simply has to happen. The place changes, and we have to adjust accordingly. I expect that Mr Jensen and Mrs Nolan, as they join in this debate, will not support Mr Humphries because they want preschools down there in Tuggeranong as that area expands.

It should be clear to all members of the house that the Government has treated this matter in a thorough and competent manner, and it will continue to do so. At no time has the Government attempted to reduce discussion to a simplistic level. It is a difficult issue. It requires consultation, and that has occurred; it requires understanding of the changing demographic and social needs, and that is occurring. The Government has shown that it is responding in a most responsible and competent manner.

MR COLLAERY (4.51): There have been comprehensive arguments put to the Assembly in support of my colleague Mr Humphries' motion, which the Rally supports, of course. Our colleague Mr Moore referred to the writings of one L.J. Schweinhart and produced data relating to a study, I believe, in Michigan or Delaware or somewhere in the United States, on delinquency figures and the rest.

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I believe that we have two approaches to a subject of this nature: one is to relate it to the Canberra condition and the other is to develop theories and stratagems that are all very well in the education debate but which do not focus really and closely on the problem that presents itself to preschool education in the ACT.

Some 20 years ago, the Canberra preschool system was looked upon as a leading, developing notion for Australia. I clearly remember at that time being engaged in the debates on this matter and in the active parental involvement in preschools. Preschooling is no new phase in Canberra's activities. The city has a very long preschool tradition and there has been a very concerned development of preschools in the ACT. In those days, of course, one went out with hammers and nails and built the tree houses - as well as all the rest of the school. So there is a Canberra tradition of preschooling, and I do not know whether we need to import the theories of Schweinhart. Certainly, those studies are useful in indicating some of the outside theory.

The real issues affecting the debate today are consultation by the Government, commitment by the Government and confidence in the Government. I believe that, on all three of those planks, the preschool issue again indicates the general failure of the Government to present credible governance of this Territory. When I say "credible" I refer, of course, to broken promises. There was an election promise given, that no school would be closed or amalgamated unless the school community agreed. Mr Speaker, I have circulated an amendment in my name, which adds a fifth paragraph to the motion. I move:

At the end, add the following paragraph:

"(5) deplores the ACT Labor Party's abandonment of its election promise that, '... no school will be closed or amalgamated unless the school community agrees'."

Mr Speaker, the consultative process has clearly broken down in the ACT and that is evident on the square outside. Whether there is confidence in the Government relates to wider issues and, of course, we heard today that, whilst there are \$300,000 on-site amenities blocks being built for the land fill workers at Belconnen Tip, there is not the money to continue with some of the preschooling requirements in the ACT.

All that was required was \$56,000 and, again, the goods have not been delivered by this Government. The real question is: how long do we put up with this level of polemical, semantic somersaulting by this Minister to get away from his principal interest in this Government - that is, a construction driven budget and a relationship with the parties involved in those things that is not as good and as fulsome as the relationship that he should have with

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the preschool community and educators and teachers in general?

On the subject of consultation, again we have seen the Pol Pot decision to compulsorily transfer some teachers - in some cases gifted teachers, who are far from being dead wood - - -

Mr Berry: I raise a point of order. Mr Collaery is talking about teaching issues; I thought we were talking about preschools.

MR SPEAKER: That is not a point of order, Mr Berry. Please proceed, Mr Collaery.

MR COLLAERY: Thank you, Mr Speaker. This Government has been on shaky ground since it produced a draft incremental budget because it needed to get views. It got views from educators immediately, from teachers, from pupils, from students and even children, who seemed to come forward spontaneously to some degree. At least they were caught up in a movement when perhaps they should have been in the classroom. But preschool children were brought to the square last week and, of course, there is widespread concern that cannot be denied. It is not a case of a pre-depression budget where there is no money to attend to these issues. The fact is that the money is there. We have seen it. We have mentioned the amenities block at the Belconnen land fill site and we could talk about other misguided priorities. Again, we have seen the incremental, tentative manner in which the Government proceeds with its policies. We have seen the first rationed-out release of the hospitals policy.

Mr Berry: I raise a point of order, Mr Speaker. We are on to hospitals now. I think the meandering must stop. We are supposed to be talking about preschools.

MR SPEAKER: I believe that Mr Collaery is making a point on finances associated with preschools. Please proceed, Mr Collaery.

MR COLLAERY: Thank you, Mr Speaker. The consultative process is really the way this Government should go; it is the way it promised in its pre-election electioneering. In education and in numerous other areas, we see that the Government is not committed to consultation.

There is no real natural justice to parents who find that, through offers of placement and confirmation tactics and infill processes, this ready system is devised whereby people who spend their day earning their living, mothers who spend their day caring for their children and taking them to and from preschool and performing their other functions - and that includes house husbands, such as Mr Moore was for a year; I give due recognition to that - do not have the time to sit in the pyramidal education offices that have now developed around the department and devise stratagems to beat down the interests of the community.

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I would like to know, Mr Speaker, how much time is being spent by some of our senior education bureaucrats on stratagems to keep this Minister and this Government out of further real trouble and how much time is spent on genuinely pursuing education issues. The Minister has a very harmonious relationship with his upper management and of course, as we all know, he was a fellow teacher with Dr Willmot in Newcastle in some past era. So the Minister is familiar with education issues and it is truly regrettable that he has lost touch with the community. It is evident from the demonstrations in the square that he has lost touch with the community on this issue and we notice his diffidence in debate here today.

Certainly, in reply, the Minister will tackle the Rally for some subject or other but once again he will twist and turn from the real topic which he should have in his mind, that is the faces of those parents looking at him last week out in the square and seeking to be delivered from the problem they have about educating and providing preschooling for their children and the time they have to spend coming and asking the Government for social justice.

MR BERRY (Minister for Community Services and Health) (5.00): After what Mr Collaery said, I think that there are some very important issues that have to be raised on the matter of consultation in relation to the preschool question. In the course of the debate Mr Collaery suggested that the Labor Party and the Labor Government had abandoned their commitment to consultation.

Of course, Mr Collaery was one of the first to walk away from consultation in the budget consultation process, which we all recall very clearly, after he found out that he would have to deliver the goods in that process. I think it just sounded as though it was a bit too hard for him, but, had he wanted to, he would have had some input in that consultation process in relation to the preschool issue.

One of the other interesting facets of consultation is the Residents Rally's performance on this issue. I think we all recall the way in which the Assembly members of the Residents Rally supported the gag against their colleague Mr Michael Moore when the Rally blew itself apart in recent events. For Mr Collaery to criticise the Labor Party's performance on consultation is an outrage. I just draw attention to the Rally's performance in relation to fluoride - how it was very consultative in relation to that matter and how that relates to preschools - - -

Mr Jensen: I raise a point of order, Mr Speaker. I am sorry, but Mr Berry was seeking to have Mr Collaery stick to the point on education in preschools, but Mr Berry is now wending away from that topic. I would appreciate it if you would get him back on line.

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MR SPEAKER: That is a little far from the mark, I think, Minister Berry.

MR BERRY: Well, Mr Speaker, I know how even-handed you are in the way that you deal with these points of order and I am sure that you will treat me with the same regard as you treated Mr Collaery.

MR SPEAKER: I certainly am even-handed, Minister, but you were getting a little bit far away from the point.

MR BERRY: But I was trying to point out that the issue of consultation that Mr Collaery raises is a red herring and has no relationship at all to the issue which is the subject of this debate. On that same issue of consultation, I might say that I am very sensitive about that because I am quite proud of the role of both the Labor Party and the Labor Government in consultation and the way that they have handled consultation on all issues. For the leader of the Residents Rally to criticise our very good record on consultation when he himself was involved in the drafting of the move-on powers without much consultation amongst the community is another outrage. I think the most important issue in this debate is how the Residents Rally leader has tried to bring into this debate something which is quite misleading, and that is the Labor Government's - - -

Mr Jensen: That is the pot calling the kettle black.

MR BERRY: Well, you would know about misleading things, too, Norm. I must say that that matches the Liberal philosophy about misleading the people - the way in which the Liberal Party has tried to link our election promises about schools to preschools. Of course they are quite different and it is quite fallacious for the Liberal Party to run off at the mouth on this issue, just as it is for the Residents Rally.

Mr Humphries: The unions?

MR BERRY: Of course we consult with unions. Mr Humphries raised the issue of unions in this education debate - that is what he is trying to turn it into - and we agree they are an important part of the Labor Party's consultation process. But on that last point, Mr Speaker, I think it is most important that the Assembly give due regard to the dishonesty of the approach by both the Liberal Party and the Residents Rally in relation to the Labor Party's commitment on schools. This preschool issue is quite separate.

MR WHALAN (Minister for Industry, Employment and Education) (5.05): I would like to deal with some of the points which have been raised. Several other members have referred to anecdotes and Mrs Nolan spoke of her particular problems of transporting children to preschool. I would like to report that I lived in the closest house to the Village Creek

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Preschool but I had to take the children by car to Taylor Preschool because of the zoning. The boundary ran down the middle of Mannheim Street, which meant that I was zoned for Taylor and had to take the children to that preschool by car, whereas the preschool at Village Creek was close by. My house was, literally, the closest to that school. That was quite an extraordinary planning anomaly, but I suppose we all learn to live with that sort of thing.

In fact, the disadvantage which we suffered as a result of having to do that is part of the access issue which has to be faced by all parents who are taking their children to preschools. In some cases they will have the opportunity of living next-door to the preschool, in which case they will be able to walk there, very conveniently. Others will require either a great constitution to walk long distances or the use of the family car to transport the children. But that is a fact of life. Even with the amalgamations that have taken place in the past - and let us not forget that the pattern of amalgamations is one which has been in existence for eight years, and there have been numerous preschool closures in that period - the communities which have been affected have still been well served by the provision of services.

I turn to the motion which has been moved by Mr Humphries. I do not wish to dwell on aspects which have been covered in the matter of public importance discussion. The first point there has been adequately dealt with. It was dealt with adequately in question time last week and it has been dealt with further in today's discussions.

In relation to the consultation process, which relates to the second paragraph of Mr Humphries' motion, I would like to comment briefly on the allegation attributed to Dr Thompson. I can only assume that either Dr Thompson has misled Mr Humphries or Mr Humphries has misled the house. But the remarks attributed to Dr Thompson did not, in fact, give a true indication of the situation.

It is my recollection that Mr Humphries said that Dr Thompson, when seeking an appointment with me, was told that he would not be able to get an appointment until "sometime next year". I was involved in the telephone conversation that took place with Dr Thompson, and quite clearly what Dr Thompson was advised was that the consultation process in relation to this issue and this policy was being undertaken between the Government and the Canberra Pre-School Society, which is the proper body with which we should be discussing this matter, the area preschool advisory committees and the Minister's schools consultative committee. So, at my level, that is the consultation that has taken place, and it is most appropriate that that be the continuing level of consultation to take place.

On the question of the proposal to meet Dr Thompson, he was advised of the meeting which took place last night with the

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schools consultative committee at which the Canberra Pre-School Society was represented. Dr Thompson was advised to contact Mr James Dexter and to advise him of their views so that the views of their group could be expressed through the appropriate consultative process at the meeting last night.

I might add that there will be further consultations on Friday morning between the executive of the Preschool Society and the chairpersons of the area preschool advisory committees in relation to these matters. That meeting will have the benefit of the final enrolment figures that have come in, and that will further enhance the quality of the consultation that will take place.

One of the features which I find intriguing is the economic rationalists on the other side of the chamber being unable to come to terms with the reality of the dilemma which any responsible administration faces in the light of static enrolments and an expanding system and the need to expand the system to provide for the needs of newly developed areas.

I can assure you, Mr Humphries, there is no way that we are going to neglect the frontier suburbs in Tuggeranong. This is precisely the outcome that Mr Humphries wants in order to protect the nice, cosy Liberal areas in the inner suburbs - in Hawker and Weetangera where the vote is high for the Liberal Party. Does he care for the people out in the frontier areas, the people who live in places where the trees are still only two feet high? This is the real motivation.

In fact, Mr Speaker, I could offer a solution to part of our problem, and Mr Humphries might be one who could help us out in this area. Let me quote some statistics. In the Woden-Weston Creek area there are 22 preschool vacancies; in Central Canberra there are 62 vacancies; in South Belconnen there are 80. In the Central Canberra there are 93. What we need is a higher birth rate in some of these suburbs.

Mr Moore: I am doing my best.

MR WHALAN: I congratulate Michael Moore on his contribution and commitment in this area, but I think there are other younger members of the Assembly who could do their bit.

Mr Kaine: I am trying too!

MR WHALAN: Those with a community conscience and a commitment to the preservation and development of our preschool society and preschool system surely must demonstrate their commitment in this particular way.

The guidelines have been stated quite clearly. There is no conflict between my statement of the guidelines and the

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guidelines as stated by Dr Eric Willmot. The position is quite clear. There are two elements of the guidelines in relation to whether or not preschools should be reduced from full-time to part-time or from part-time to amalgamation with another preschool.

In tabling documents, Mr Humphries is merely tabling extracts from various things that Dr Willmot has said over a long period. Dr Willmot has stated two aspects and he stated them quite clearly. I have heard that from two people - one was a journalist and one was a member of this Assembly - who were present at that meeting. They have both reported to me that this is an accurate statement. Dr Willmot did refer to the figure 17 but he also qualified it by saying that it could not be examined in isolation, but it had to be looked at in terms of vacancies within the regional area. It is this qualification which is so important. Those with fewer than 17 will be closed, but those with more than 17 do not have a guarantee that they will remain open because there must be a requirement to examine the vacancies in the region.

In conclusion, I think that in an ideal world we would all like to provide a preschool on every corner, but we cannot do that. When the population contracts, a responsible and prudent government must take steps to respond and to ensure that the community gets the best use of the limited resources which are available to it.

MR STEVENSON (5.15): This matter greatly concerns many people in Canberra. In the Coalition I receive many letters from concerned parents about the closure of preschools. We have heard the suggestion that schools include preschools or that they do not include preschools. However, I have not the slightest doubt that, when the Government talks about schools not closing, in the minds of the mums and dads that includes preschools.

This talk about the closure of preschools is of a somewhat heavy-handed nature. What is wrong with a more valid look at what could be done to perhaps make them more effective and more efficient? I know that there was a media release from the Canberra Pre-School Society indicating their grave disillusionment with the ACT Labor Government's consultative process. We have certainly seen a lot of that, or perhaps I should say, a great lack of the ALP Labor Government's consultative process.

Members of the business community recently said that they were not fairly consulted about the payroll tax and the occupational health and safety legislation. The leaders of the Residents Rally and Liberal Party recently felt so strongly about the budget consultative process that was set up by the Chief Minister that they left the consultation process. In my own case in the "Legislative Assembly (Members' Staff Restriction) Bill" I have been trying to get some consultation through the Chief Minister for some time, with no effect whatsoever. So I can well understand

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the Canberra Pre-School Society indicating its grave concern about the lack of consultation by the Labor Party in the area of preschools.

What we need are clear guidelines so that the mums and dads and people running the schools know where they stand. Perhaps the closure of preschools may not cause any harm to children. I am not sure about that, but is there valid research available in this area? Mr Moore mentioned earlier that research has been done. Research has also been done by US educationalist, Dr Raymond Moore, a doctor of education. He has done extensive research on family, school and educational matters. These are people to whom we also should look. Dr Moore makes some very important statements. He says:

The greatest teaching for children involves many loving and thoughtful one to one responses - inspiring and encouraging adult examples and much more freedom to explore.

Another US expert, Dr James Dobson, who was the clinical professor of paediatrics at the USC School of Medicine, spoke very highly of Dr Moore and said that he stood like a rock against developmental psychologists in the 1960s and 1970s who were universally extolling the virtues of early schooling. In this tidal wave of public and professional opinion, Dr Moore confidently reported his research findings - namely, that children suffer when taken too early from the security of their homes.

I think perhaps Dr Moore's warning was that, when we make our laws and educational policies primarily for those few parents who do not care instead of for the majority of parents who certainly do care, then our policies and laws may be going backwards. He urges that the burden of proof be on the state before the state hastily intervenes in the parent-child relationship. He argues for full parental involvement and responsibility in government decisions and says:

As long as children meet the state's achievement and behavioural standards, then parents should be allowed to determine the nature of their children's education.

I think parents need help, not attacks from perhaps uncaring and unfriendly governments. We need to understand that it is the parents' responsibility in this matter; the parents should have the freedom of choice. I am against that being taken away by governments. If parents want preschools in an area, there should be a full consultative process. What we constantly hear again and again from members in opposition parties, from people in the business community and in this case from people in the preschool community is that there is not a valid consultative process. I suggest that, if there were, these constant, ongoing claims made day after day in this Assembly would

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not be occurring. Let us give the preschool mums and dads the freedom of choice in the same way as they should have it in the area of fluoride.

MR HUMPHRIES (5.22), in reply: I just want to sum up quickly, Mr Speaker. I will not take a moment. Having had aspersions cast not only on my philosophy but also on my virility, I think the Chief Minister's comments deserve a reply - - -

Ms Follett: The Deputy Chief Minister, Mr Humphries. I have never questioned your virility!

MR HUMPHRIES: I apologise sincerely, Chief Minister, for confusing you with the Deputy Chief Minister; that is a heinous mistake which I hope never to repeat. The Government has made a very strong case for saying that there are sometimes good reasons for closing preschools, and I do not dispute that. I do not think anybody here would say that preschools must always stay open whatever the circumstances, and I would hope that no-one reading or listening to this debate would make that assumption.

But that is not the point of this motion or the amendments that have been moved to it. The point of the motion is to address the Labor Party's failure to comply with its own election promises. That is the issue. The issue there is how the Government proceeds with the task of closing preschools. That was central to its promise to the electorate in the recent campaign and it is central to this motion.

The fact is that the Labor Party bought votes, hand over fist, in the recent election by appealing to parents, and particularly preschool parents, by saying, "We, the Labor Party, have better credentials in the area of education than do our opponents. Therefore, vote for us. We are the ones who will save your schools. We are the ones who will abolish your preschool fees. We are the ones who will deliver what the other parties cannot". Now, this Government is going back on its word and it should be held accountable to the people whose votes it bought so shamelessly. It should be held accountable for those broken promises, and that is what this motion is all about.

Amendment agreed to.

MR MOORE (5.24): I move:

At the end, add the following paragraph -

"(6) urges the Labor Government to assure the Assembly and the community that no preschool will be closed (or amalgamated) for 1990 without the full agreement of the local area advisory group and the Canberra Pre-school Society."

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Let me state initially, Mr Speaker, that I did not support Mr Collaery's amendment because, as much as I do deplore the actions of the ACT Labor Party in this area, its promise was clearly that no school would be closed. Preschools were not mentioned, so I feel that the amendment does not quite come to grips with the problem. At the same time, let me use this opportunity to emphasise that I do deplore the Government's actions this far and I think that this amendment will make that a little clearer.

I have specifically chosen 1990 because the consultation period that we have spoken about is so very brief. At this stage, basically, the preschool advisory committees have been given something like three weeks to try to come to grips with this rather difficult decision which was aptly described as Sophie's choice by my colleague Mr Humphries. I have been quite specific about the words "for 1990". I am not talking about 1991, by which time an understanding of how the preschool system works can be given to parents and can be dealt with under those circumstances.

I have also included a stipulation about the full agreement of the local area advisory group and the Canberra Pre-school Society. Those groups are very much aware when such a situation arises that the preschools within their area are causing some problems. They are certainly aware of the standard procedures that Mr Whalan has described where preschool numbers drop below 17 and where the whole area has a reduction in numbers.

That is the sort of thing we are talking about, although Mr Whalan gave us some confusing figures. He quoted Central Canberra twice, first as having 62 vacancies, and secondly as having 93 vacancies. I am not quite sure how that happened, but it does indicate some confusion.

I urge members of this Assembly to take this opportunity to show their genuine support for the preschools by giving them a year's breathing time in accordance with the request of various preschool groups and supporting this amendment to the motion.

MR JENSEN (5.27): Mr Speaker, as a parent of two children - long past the preschool stage, I must add - I feel that I have some qualifications to speak about the preschool area. As a parent in Townsville, I was involved in the establishment of the preschool system that was being set up at the time by the Queensland Government. In those days, the proposal was that every state school in Queensland would have attached to it a government preschool, with a minimum of 25 students. The preschool of which I was the president of the P&C was one of the first to open in Townsville.

Later in my army career, when I moved to Canungra, I was the secretary of the preschool society there, which operated under the guise and through the arrangements of the Creche and Kindergarten Association of Queensland.

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Funds were provided in much the same way as they were provided for State government preschools as long as the preschools met certain criteria laid down by the government and the Creche and Kindergarten Association. So I feel that I do have some qualifications to speak on this issue.

Mr Moore has raised the issue of the importance of preschool education. The Rally has always maintained that preschool education is not really discretionary; it is important. If there are parents who do not wish to send their children to preschool, that is fine. That is their decision. But I would suggest that it is appropriate for a government, seeking to improve the facilities for and the abilities of our young children in the future, to provide every opportunity for them to have access to preschool education, which is a very important part of the education process. It is not a discretionary requirement; it is part of the education process.

Mr Speaker, the Rally will not support the amendment proposed by Mr Moore, basically because we believe that the motion put forward by Mr Humphries, particularly in paragraph (4), quite clearly meets the requirements. If we accepted Mr Moore's amendment we would be duplicating that particular matter in the motion. I refer to the words "immediate publication of its criteria for preschool closures and by entering into full and real consultation with affected preschool communities". I think it is important to note that Mr Humphries has included "affected preschool communities". That includes the actual parents and citizens associations that are related to that particular school.

Any of us who have worked in preschool associations as members of the parents and citizens body know how important that group is and how it relates to the development of that preschool and the development of our children's education. It is not just the Canberra Pre-school Society or the local area advisory group that should be consulted on this matter, but also the parents themselves. As Mrs Nolan has said and as Mr Whalan has also indicated, if this proposal that the Minister has put forward is put into practice, many parents will have to travel long distances to preschools.

In closing, I would like to say that the Rally supports the motion. Mr Moore made the comment about no school being closed. The Rally makes no distinction between "preschool" and "school". They are schools and they provide schooling and education for our children. That is the major point. "School" is the same thing as "preschool" as far as I am concerned, and it is the same thing as "a college". So the Rally will be supporting wholeheartedly the motion moved by Mr Humphries with Mr Collaery's amendment, which has already been added to that motion.

MR DUBY (5.31): This has been a long, varied and interesting debate this afternoon. I think my party will

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be supporting the motion as put by Mr Humphries and the amendment as moved by Mr Collaery.

MR MOORE (5.32): In winding up the debate on my amendment, I should point out that this is really a declaration. Although I do not have a personal interest in monetary terms, I should point out to the Assembly that I have a personal interest in that my second son, Brenton, is booked into the Reid Preschool.

Mr Humphries: I raise a point of order, Mr Speaker. I was not aware that a member had the right of reply in debate on an amendment.

MR MOORE: I seek leave of the Assembly to make a very brief statement of personal information.

Leave granted.

MR MOORE: It is a very brief statement. I wish to point out that in one sense it could be construed that I had a personal interest here. I just wanted to clarify that that was the case so that nobody could suggest that I was trying to do this in an underhand way.

Amendment negatived.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

PLANNING, DEVELOPMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE - STANDING COMMITTEE

MR DUBY (5.33), by leave: I move:

That this Assembly -

- (1) has complete confidence in the independence of the members of the Standing Committee on Planning, Development and Infrastructure in their deliberations and report on the Canberra Times redevelopment reference; and
- (2) deplores any inference in Mr Moore's media information today on this subject, that the members of the Standing Committee on Planning, Development and Infrastructure were lacking in independence and objectivity.

Mr Speaker, Mr Moore has taken the liberty to issue a press release today criticising the report brought down by the Planning, Development and Infrastructure Committee. Of course he has a perfect right to do so, and no-one would wish to interfere with that. Undoubtedly, as we have seen in the last couple of days, all reports do not have the unanimous support of members of this house. However, I feel that the wording of this press release casts aspersions on the independence of the committee in bringing down its report.

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Now, I think I know - and I think we all know - the basis of the allegations made in this press statement.

Mr Moore: Which allegations? Be specific about the allegations.

MR DUBY: I am going to go through them in a moment, Mr Moore. Mr Collaery also features in this release. His name is the only name mentioned.

Ms Follett: And mine.

MR DUBY: And the Chief Minister's, of course; she gets her sixpence worth in. Whilst Mr Moore and Mr Collaery may be in the middle of a lovers' tiff, or whatever, I do not think it is appropriate that the good intentions of myself, Mr Kaine and Mr Wood should also be brought into question. For example, this statement says:

The Legislative Assembly's Planning, Development and Infrastructure Committee report on the Canberra Times site has told the Follett Government exactly what it wanted to hear according to Independent MLA Michael Moore.

"The Committee's conclusions couldn't have been more to the Government's liking if Ms Follett had written them herself", Mr Moore said. "Its recommendations are a victory for political party machinery dedicated to a narrow view of Canberra's economic future".

Well, Mr Speaker, the inference that I take from that is that the committee has received instructions from Ms Follett, advising us in some way as to what the recommendations of the committee should be, advising us of the Government's preferred outcome of our inquiry, and I, personally, take umbrage at that sort of inference.

It then goes on with a number of personal attacks against the chairman of the committee, and I will not go into that domestic argument. But it then goes on to say that Mr Collaery has effectively endorsed a majority view. It says:

He has endorsed the call for one more office block building to be put up in Civic, saying that next time there should be an environmental impact assessment before any new projects are approved. That is exactly what was recommended when the Federal Joint Parliamentary Committee on the ACT gave the go ahead on the Section 38 development. We were stuck in a time warp. How many more projects will the Committee, or Mr Collaery for that matter, approve of, saying, just one more building and then we will have an EIS?

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Well, I think the committee made it fairly clear in its deliberations that it had looked very closely into all environmental issues relating to this development. Once again I take umbrage at that. The release continues:

It is a sell-out on sound environmental principles by the committee.

I think nothing could be further from the truth. These matters were examined at length by all members of the committee and these matters were taken into consideration completely. It goes on:

The inner-city residents have also been sold out by the Committee's call for parking restrictions but without any guidelines on what these restrictions should be. This leaves the Government free to decide for itself on the methods of turning the streets into parking lots.

Once again, I think this is frankly unfactual information. It is disinformation. The media release continues:

Mr Moore said that the Committee's shaky grasp on the real issues were amply demonstrated by the publication today of further National Capital Plan Draft, Volume 2.

The bit that I found particularly annoying was this:

"What we are being given ... is a choice between a building which will never be fully occupied or one that will add substantially to the environmental problems in Civic. Either way, the Committee has put the seal of approval on a potential environmental business and planning disaster", Mr Moore said.

Once again, anyone who has taken the time to read the committee's report will see that all those issues have been addressed. The media release is also unfactual when it maintains that the only way that office space in that building could possibly be filled is by means of public servants. That is simply a downright untruth. We all know the current market situation for office accommodation in Civic. As a matter of fact, it was highlighted in the paper earlier this week. There is absolutely no doubt that private enterprise will snap up the prime office location in that spot. I am raising these issues and reading extracts from Mr Moore's media release into the record to show just how biased and unfactual his release is.

The implication is that the committee members have not been independent in their deliberations, and I would urge all members of this Assembly to support my motion expressing confidence in the Planning, Development and Infrastructure Committee, as indeed by inference we should be expressing confidence in the independence of all standing committees and select committees of this Assembly.

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This sort of attitude that has been revealed today does nothing to instil public confidence in the findings of committees. It makes one wonder why on earth we had committee hearings in the first place - that the best thing to do would be simply to come in, throw it on the table, have a quick debate in which our emotions rule our hearts and our hearts rule our heads, and come up with whatever we think is politically viable or acceptable at the time. That is simply not the case and it is not acceptable. So I would urge members of the Assembly to support my motion.

MR WHALAN (Minister for Industry, Employment and Education) (5.41): This is a strange sort of motion, given the fact that it is being raised in a chamber of this sort. The reality is that what we are on about here is politics, and every person in this chamber has an interest in and commitment to politics and the political view of a particular persuasion. Those of us who are in parties will have platforms which will indicate the commitment that we as a group support and adhere to. Independent members and smaller groupings may have a different range of commitments. But it does mean that we hold our views very strongly.

We saw yesterday a demonstration of the Liberal Party consistently calling for divisions when we were debating the occupational health and safety legislation. Whenever the question of a relevant union or appropriate union was mentioned in the detail stage of that legislation the Liberals called for division after division.

That caused a bit of inconvenience to us, but none of us would deny the Liberal Party its right to do that. That is very, very important. None of us would deny Liberal members the right to highlight the strength with which they hold their commitment about that aspect of the legislation. Also, I seem to recall that, when the move-on powers legislation was being debated, we in the Labor Party took a very strong stand on that issue, and we fought that legislation clause by clause. Again, we called for a division on every occasion, because we wanted to use that mechanism to highlight where we stood on the issue for our constituency. I am sure that that was part of the motivation of the Liberals when they adopted the same position in relation to occupational health and safety.

Of course, there are those of us who adopt very strong positions on matters which come before this Assembly, and probably there is nothing that demonstrates that better than the question of the introduction of fluoride to the drinking water. Some members have been concerned about a member of a committee which is actively inquiring into the question of the appropriateness of fluoridation of water being out on a public platform, in a public debate, speaking from an extremely firmly held point of view, thus demonstrating a position which would, at best, suggest that that person was less than objective when going into the committee deliberations.

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While there might have been reservations about that, I think there was sufficient tolerance within the Assembly to avoid taking any action against that person by way of suggesting that he not participate in the deliberations of the committee because of his very firmly held and publicly stated views. No-one has suggested that at all. What I am suggesting is that we will constantly find within the chamber people who hold views more vigorously than others and they will seek to speak on those views more strenuously than others. That is a fact of life.

I think that the reaction to Mr Moore's press release today - especially the second paragraph of this motion - is an overreaction. We are quite happy to support the first paragraph, which is a positive statement of the confidence we have in the way in which the committee has conducted its affairs, but we would submit that the second paragraph is an overreaction and is not consistent with the way in which we have allowed freedom and tolerated the views and expressions of other members of the Assembly on other issues on other occasions. I would add that I think that it might be counterproductive to adopt this resolution. It might be counterproductive in so far as it draws attention to something that people might otherwise prefer not to expose to publicity.

MR KAINE (Leader of the Opposition) (5.47): I will be brief because I think the matter ought to be dealt with quickly. I have some sympathy for the argument put forward by the Deputy Chief Minister, but I think that the thrust of his argument was in the wrong direction. What we have done before was always to sustain the concept of the integrity of the members of committees. That was the reason why, in the pursuance of the fluoride debate, some of us argued very strongly that it was the right of any member to sit on that committee, irrespective of his or her personal view. We were arguing in favour of the maintenance of the integrity of members who sit on committees.

I have only had a very quick look at this media release. It takes the opposite view. It questions the integrity of the members of this committee. It has not accepted the general proposition of this Assembly, that its members can act in an unbiased way on committees. It questions that concept. Quite frankly, Mr Speaker, I take offence at the fact that my integrity, in dealing with the matter of the Canberra Times site, is being questioned by a member of this house, and that is what that press release does. It asserts that somehow I have responded to my party machine. I did not even discuss that report, as it was being developed, with the members of my own party sitting here with me. I certainly did not discuss it with members of my party and I certainly did not take any directions from them. Nor, Mr Speaker, did I take any directions from the Chief Minister on the matter.

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To suggest publicly and openly that I did so is something about which I really take offence. I really think that the member concerned ought to search his conscience and ask himself whether, if he feels this way about members of this Assembly, he ought to dissociate himself from all committees because he might be biased and have this sort of allegation levelled against him. I suggest he should consider whether he should resign from any committee on which he currently sits. Having regard to the fact that he was elected to it as a member of the Residents Rally and not as an independent, one must question whether he can act independently on any committee. He himself has raised the question, Mr Speaker; I did not.

So I do object and I think that while the Deputy Chief Minister's approach was, on the face of it, reasonable, he is in fact arguing against himself and against the concept of the integrity of members of this Assembly.

MR WOOD (5.50): Mr Speaker, I rise to make one comment only, and that is that there was certainly no attempt anywhere along the line, either directly or indirectly, by the Follett Government to express a view to this committee. I am very well positioned to know if such a thing had happened and, as part of this debate, I would like to assure the chamber that any suggestion that the Follett Government had a role in this is quite incorrect.

DR KINLOCH (5.51): These are rather sad matters. Perhaps I am not tough enough for this Assembly. I often think perhaps I am not.

Mr Moore: Clown!

Mr Jensen: I take a point of order, Mr Speaker. Mr Moore referred to Dr Kinloch as a clown and I think that is totally inappropriate. I request you to ask him to withdraw.

MR SPEAKER: He was not speaking. It was an aside, Mr Jensen. Please keep your language civil, Mr Moore. Please proceed, Dr Kinloch.

DR KINLOCH: I take no umbrage at all, I assure you. Because I feel sometimes sad about these things, perhaps in a Pollyanna-like way, it well could be that I need a thicker skin, to be sure.

I wish we could go back three squares, and I wonder whether it would be possible first of all for Mr Moore to withdraw his press release and then for Mr DUBY to withdraw his motion.

I would just like to note that, when Mr Jensen and I saw the committee report this morning, it was the first time we knew what was going to be in that report. There had been no attempt whatsoever to chivvy anybody into any particular position on that report and I assure the Assembly that Mr Collaery was acting on his own independent judgment.

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MR MOORE (5.52): Mr Speaker, I have checked through my press release. I do not see that it has anything to do with integrity or objectivity. It certainly has to do with promises and broken promises. It certainly has to do with comparisons, and the inference referred to by Mr Duby is a comparison with the Government's view.

Comments about the spelling mistakes and so forth have to do with the fact that, whilst other people have computers, I have a typewriter and I thought it was more important in this case to get the media release out. I now have a computer and it is actually going, as of yesterday; it just does not have a printer. It is rather difficult to put a press release out with a computer and no printer. So to a certain extent I still have my hands tied.

It is very interesting that I should find myself being defended by Mr Whalan. Some very great ironies occur in this house. Although in a previous life I often found it disturbing to hear the Deputy Chief Minister refer to "the Residents Rally party", I have to acknowledge the far-sightedness of his observation. It may be purely coincidental, but the initials of the Residents Rally party, RRP, happen to be the same as those for recommended retail price, a term most shoppers are familiar with. With the Rally's performance of late, I wonder just what that price is.

Mr Kaine: Mr Speaker, I have to take a point of order. Whether the present speaker acknowledges it or not, this debate is about his questioning of the integrity of members of this Assembly. He is still doing that in the course of this debate; he is continuing to question the integrity of members of this Assembly. I think it is time to put a stop to it, Mr Speaker.

MR SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr Kaine. Please direct your statements to the motion, Mr Moore.

MR MOORE: Certainly, Mr Speaker. Let us look at the motion. The first part says that this Assembly has complete confidence in the independence of the members of the Standing Committee on Planning, Development and Infrastructure in their deliberations and report on the Canberra Times redevelopment reference.

Certainly, Mr Speaker, I am quite happy to support that part of the motion. However, the second part is another story entirely. I have a great deal of difficulty understanding why members of the Assembly have chosen to support the clear paranoia of one of its number. I shall not address that particular person. If they continue to do so, I wonder whether it will bring them into even more disrepute.

Let me state, Mr Speaker, that I have not made one single comment about the Canberra Times site from the day I debated

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this issue with vigour in the Assembly until this report was brought down. I have not made one single comment, and that indicates my attitude to the committee. If I disagree with a committee when it brings its comment down, by golly, I will say so. And if I disagree strongly, I will let people know because that is my responsibility. Each member of the Assembly should have that same responsibility. If members support this motion, then they are backing down. They are not going to be able to say anything about the findings of any committee. When any members of the Assembly fail to keep their promises, as the Residents Rally and Bernard Collaery have done, then are other members going to sit back and say nothing? Of course that is not the case.

I am a little disturbed that some other members of the committee have read into my press release an inference that does not exist. I am not concerned about Mr Collaery's psychological projectionism, because that is a problem that he will have to deal with himself.

I draw attention to the findings of the casino committee. Did Dr Kinloch accept the findings of that committee? When Mr Jensen wrote his dissenting report - and this is in my media release - he stated clearly and categorically what his view was and why. By doing that he still managed to keep his promise to the people who had elected him. That is the sort of thing we are dealing with now. We are talking about the freedom of people to keep their promises, to make their own statements and to present clearly to the people of Canberra their views on certain issues. That is what I am intending to do and that is what I will continue to do while I am a member of this Assembly.

I will stay a member of this Assembly, remembering of course that any suggestions that have been made by my colleagues Mr Collaery and Mr Kaine that I might resign would mean that my position could be turned back to one of Mr Collaery's cronies. This, of course, would then provide the opportunity for Mr Collaery and Mr Kaine to rapidly take themselves into government and get that power which is so critical to them.

MR DUBY (5.58), in reply: As there are no more speakers, I shall finish off the debate on this motion. Mr Moore said that he regarded his media release as merely a political statement and that he could not see how it reflected in any way on the independence of the committee members. I will repeat what the release says. It says that the committee's report has told the Follett Government exactly what it wanted to hear and that the committee's conclusions could not have been more to the Government's liking.

Mr Moore: On a point of order, Mr Speaker; there is a difference between inference and what is actually written.

MR SPEAKER: Order! Mr Moore, that is not a point of order. Please proceed, Mr Duby.

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MR DUBY: I was quoting the release. It says:

The Committee's conclusions couldn't have been more to the Government's liking if Ms Follett had written them herself ... Its recommendations are a victory for political party machinery dedicated to a narrow view of Canberra's economic future.

I do not regard myself as being part of political party machinery.

There are a couple of other phrases here to which I take objection. It says:

It is a sell-out on sound environmental principles by the Committee ... The inner-city residents have also been sold out by the Committee.

Where I come from, "selling out" is a bit of a dirty word and it has all sorts of sinister implications. I do not like it, and I am sure the rest of the Assembly will join with me in showing that they have complete confidence in the independence of the Standing Committee on Planning, Development and Infrastructure.

Ms Follett: Could I suggest that the two parts of the motion be taken separately? Standing order 133 refers to this matter.

MR SPEAKER: Thank you, Chief Minister. I take that as a guidance. I therefore propose that the motion be submitted in two parts. To that end the question is:

That paragraph (1) be agreed to.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Question put:

That paragraph (2) be agreed to.

The Assembly voted -

AYES, 11

NOES, 6

Mr Collaery
Mr Duby
Mr Humphries
Mr Jensen
Mr Kaine
Dr Kinloch
Ms Maher
Mrs Nolan
Mr Prowse
Mr Stefaniak
Mr Stevenson

Mr Berry
Ms Follett
Mrs Grassby
Mr Moore
Mr Whalan
Mr Wood

Question so resolved in the affirmative.

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CONDUCT OF DEBATE

MR SPEAKER: Before members leave, I wish to make a statement. I ask members to plan their speeches according to the time limits detailed in standing orders, particularly on MPIs which have a one hour duration, thus giving as many members as possible the opportunity to speak. The second thing I would ask, before Mr Wood disappears, is that the Administration and Procedures Committee meet in my office immediately after we adjourn. Thirdly, I observe with dismay the motion found necessary by Mr DUBY. I implore members to raise the level of debate and the level of public comment, particularly to the media, so that we all benefit and are seen in the eyes of the community as something worth while.

ADJOURNMENT

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

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

Australian Army Memorial

MR JENSEN (6.04): Mr Speaker, I rise in this adjournment debate to comment today on a dedication ceremony on Anzac Parade for the Australian army's national memorial. Some people may have noticed the advertisement in the Canberra Times this week encouraging the public and telling them that they were welcome to attend this ceremony which was to dedicate this latest memorial on Anzac Parade today.

Today is an important anniversary for the men and women who have served in the Australian army - a privilege of which I, like my father and other members of my family who have served, am proud. I also understand that the Chief Minister's father served in the army and I am sure that there are other members in this Assembly with similar experiences, either personally or within their family.

Today is the seventy-fifth anniversary of the departure of the first Australian Imperial Force for service in the Middle East and Europe. The subsequent service of these men and women at places such as Gallipoli, the Somme, Menin Road and Pozieres set the standard for the legends of Australian diggers, mateship and service which have been carried down through the years as soldiers fought and died in later battles at places like Tobruk, El Alamein and the Kokoda Trail in the Second World War; Kapyong during service with the United Nations in Korea; and Long Tan, Coral and Balmoral in the Vietnam conflict.

This mateship is symbolised in pictures like this one that I am holding up, which is well known to people who have

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read of and take an interest in the life and work of the Australian digger, and also in the statue of Simpson and his donkey near the entrance to the Australian War Memorial. These battle honours appeared on some of the regimental colours which were on parade today as a representative sample of regimental and Queen's colours held by regiments and units around Australia.

However, let it not be said that such memorials are there in glorification of war. A visit to the Australian War Memorial or its excellent research facility provides a graphic reminder of the futility of war and the fact that we in Australia have been fortunate not to have our country experience a major invasion of our borders, although the people of Darwin and Sydney did have contact with the effect of military hardware during the Second World War.

The memorial to the Australian army, dedicated today, acknowledges the past and present service of men and women in the army, a factor acknowledged today by the Prime Minister, the Governor-General and the Chief of the General Staff. It is at this stage, however, that I pause to reflect on a matter of some concern.

I have raised the fact that our Government was not represented there today, not in an official capacity, which is most unfortunate. However, I understand that invitations have now been issued to Assembly members to participate in remembrance ceremonies on 11 November. I have no doubt that the Government will be fully represented at the next dedication ceremony of this type in October 1992 when it is expected that thousands of Vietnam veterans and their families will arrive in Canberra from throughout Australia and overseas on the fifth anniversary of the welcome-home march for Vietnam veterans.

Before I close, Mr Speaker, I would like to comment briefly on the memorial and the symbolism which, while it does refer to past deeds and sacrifices of army servicemen and women and their families, does look ahead to the future. It is a physical representation of two diggers facing east to the rising sun, the acknowledged symbol of the Australian Imperial Force and still worn with pride by all new members of our modern army. The memorial, with its seven cylindrical pillars, represents the seven major campaigns in which the army has been involved. These pillars are set in a pool of water to symbolise the journey across the water to help keep our nation free.

In closing, Mr Speaker, I ask all members to ponder on the significance of today to the army and the nation, and pray that we do not have to add another pillar to this memorial.

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Australian Army Memorial

MR STEFANIAK (6.09): Very briefly, I would like to fully endorse Mr Jensen's remarks, and I think we should thank him very much for bringing this matter to the attention of the Assembly.

Australian Army Memorial

MR STEVENSON (6.10): Mr Speaker, may I fully endorse the remarks as well.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Assembly adjourned at 6.10 pm

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ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

The following answer to a question was provided:

Kingston Foreshores

Ms Follett: On 26 October 1989 **Mrs Nolan** asked:

Back in July, a motion was passed in relation to the Kingston foreshores site. What work has been done to date to that for that reference by the Government and when will the Government be referring the preliminary investigation to the planning committee?

My answer is as follows: members will recall that in July the Assembly debated a motion to refer the development of the Kingston foreshore area to the Standing Committee on Planning, Development and Infrastructure. It was agreed that the matter not go to the committee until an assessment of current proposals for the area had been completed by the Interim Territory Planning Authority. I advised the Assembly during the debate on 27 July 1989 that there would be some delay. I stated the following:

I am relaxed about that proposed amendment by Mr Jensen, but I think members should be aware that, in adopting that amendment, they will be postponing for some considerable time the work of the standing committee in looking at the Kingston foreshore area because I am afraid it is a fact that the Kingston foreshore is one of a number of important policy areas which we are calling upon our bureaucrats to address as a matter of urgency and that I have given priority in my area to the drafting of appropriate planning, environment and heritage legislation, and I intend to adhere to that priority.

So any work that would be done by the Government on the question of the Kingston foreshore site could be quite some little time away, but if it is the intention of Mr Jensen, in moving his amendment, that the committee consider the Kingston foreshore area in the light of the Government's recommendations, I take it that he accepts that there will be that delay.

Whilst the drafting of integrated planning, leasing, environment and heritage legislation is well advanced, the authority's top priority now is the preparation of the draft Territory plan. Broad considerations to policy for Kingston will be given in that plan. Detailed assessment of development proposals for Kingston may proceed after that time.