



DEBATES

OF THE

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

FOR THE

AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

HANSARD

30 May 1990

Wednesday, 30 May 1990

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

PETITIONS

The Clerk: The following petitions have been lodged for presentation, and a copy will be referred to the appropriate Minister:

Royal Canberra Hospital

To the members of the Australian Capital Territory Legislative Assembly in parliament as assembled.

The signatures contained herein from the constituents of the A.C.T. respectfully showeth that the decision to close Royal Canberra Hospital should be reversed and that it should be upgraded to its former excellent standard for the people of Canberra and your petitioners as in duty bound will ever pray.

By **Ms Follett** (from 19,368 citizens), **Mr Moore** (from 20,466 citizens), and **Mr Berry** (from 1,625 citizens).

Petitions received.

ROYAL CANBERRA HOSPITAL - CLOSURE

MS FOLLETT (Leader of the Opposition): I seek the leave of the Assembly to read a letter which came to me with the petition.

Leave granted.

MS FOLLETT: I thank the Assembly. The letter says:

Dear Ms Follett,

We come in peace and good will to convey to the ACT Legislative Assembly the wishes of the people of Canberra and the surrounding regions.

The people are concerned and very angry that the ACT Alliance Government is closing the Royal Canberra Hospital to create another principal

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hospital. We believe that we already have a principal hospital, the Royal Canberra Hospital, and we do not need another one.

The Royal Canberra Hospital has always been the major trauma and acute care hospital of the ACT and the surrounding regions. The highly trained dedicated teams of health professionals have provided excellent health care services for the community 24 hours a day for so many years. They have saved our lives and the lives of our loved ones.

The members of the Augment Royal Canberra Hospital Committee have collected 19,368 petitions stating that the decision to close the Royal Canberra Hospital should be reversed and that it should be upgraded to its former excellent standard for the people of Canberra and the surrounding regions.

We call on Ms Rosemary Follett MLA, the Labor Leader of the Opposition in the ACT Legislative Assembly, to present these petitions to the Assembly. Furthermore, the people are requesting that their wishes are respected and they seek the support of all members in the Assembly and an assurance that the Royal Canberra Hospital will continue to provide an excellent health care service to the community. The people need to feel secure in the knowledge that when they or their loved ones are sick, that they receive the best possible care in a public health facility regardless as to whether they have the money to pay for it. We must not replace public hospitals with private hospitals. The people of Canberra put their trust in the ACT Government and that trust should not be undermined by the closure of this public health facility.

I have been requested to read this letter to the Assembly by the signatories, Mr Gunther Emmelman and Ms Regina Slazenger, OM.

SCHOOL CLOSURES

MR WOOD (10.33): I move:

That school closures are unnecessary and will severely diminish the quality of education in the ACT.

The Education Minister, Mr Humphries, has not demonstrated the need to close any school. He has demonstrated no educational need. He has not tried that argument, knowing that it could not possibly succeed; nor has he made any serious effort to demonstrate an economic need. He has

made some wildly optimistic statements about the savings that may be made, but he is charging ahead with no idea of where he is going.

In yesterday's question time he answered a question - as he has done on other days and in other places - about the expected savings from school closures, but he has no idea. In his answer he seemed to want to be in a position where he can hack away at schools as the need arises, as that need is determined later. Even if we take the figure that he has touted of \$100m over some period or other, it would nevertheless be essential for the Minister to be able to identify quite clearly what he hopes to achieve by school closures. That seems to me to be a basic principle - that you know what you are going to achieve.

He is quite unable to make any statement to that effect. Nowhere has there been any study that he has initiated that can show what his program will achieve in the end. On this side of the house, we believe it will achieve only damage, an entirely negative effect. But before he embarks on this rash course he must know whether he can make the significant savings that he seeks.

The Labor Party argues that our schools are good, and nobody in this community denies that. We know that they are educationally viable. We maintain that they should not close. But even if we take the argument on the Minister's stance, he must demonstrate that he can achieve what he wants to achieve, and he cannot do that. The likelihood is that he will close schools, wreak havoc on the system and still not make the savings that he sets out to make.

In recent times, a cost-benefit study has been made by a very competent academic of the Australian National University, and I see in today's paper that that is being considered by Department of Education and ACTION officers. I am pleased about that. I want to refer to that document and to another document by a graduate student in economics at the University of Canberra that has come to my attention. The academic's findings have been widely reported. I hope the media have been successful in sparking the Minister's interest.

I first want to refer to a comment by the Minister, as I believe I heard it at a public meeting, when he indicated that, really, there were no great savings by way of staffing if schools were amalgamated. I think this is one key element. It is something that perhaps the Minister has come to learn. Although I do not think we could call it a cost-benefit analysis, he did indicate in this chamber - and I would be very happy to see the detail of it - that there were savings of about \$200,000 per school from the last round of closures a year or so ago. That is an interesting figure. We should bear in mind that that figure probably did not include the additional costs that are associated with school closures. It does not relate to any financial aspects of refurbishment, bussing, cost of

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demountables and so on. There is no evidence at all of the serious study of the cost-benefits by Mr Humphries or anybody in his department.

The Priorities Review Board document makes reference to savings, and it seems to do so by using it as a positive to explain why schools should close. I am surprised at this. I read this on pages 133 and 134 of the document, and it seems to me to be a pathetically weak argument - in fact it is an argument against closing any schools. This is what it says:

On the table we have indicated estimated recurrent savings would reach \$5.3m.

To achieve that, what has to happen? We have to close 21 schools and colleges to save \$5.3m. That says very powerfully, "For heaven's sake, we can't close 21 schools and colleges for that piddling amount. What a nonsense that is". That is the best economic argument for school closures that this document can present! How ridiculous it is.

In a whole range of matters this document hangs arguments on pathetically weak grounds. I am sure that, if he can, Mr Humphries will - perhaps today - table the paperwork behind that thinking. That is one cost-benefit study that gives clear evidence why we should not close any schools. Dr Perkins is the ANU academic who prepared a cost-benefit statement and she says this:

As yet, no convincing data has been released by the Department of Education that small schools are significantly more expensive. Once the cost of relocating and bussing students and refurbishing amalgamated schools is taken into account, it is likely that savings will be minimal or non-existent.

The survey that was done by the graduate student at the University of Canberra considered the Weston Creek area only. It selected six primary schools presently there and costed how much would be saved if that number were reduced to four in order to meet that target of 400 students per school that the Minister talks about. That exercise said this:

The cost-benefit analysis showed that in the immediate future there is virtually no difference between closing two schools and maintaining current levels. In the future, to 1994 the decline in enrolments makes the differences more pronounced.

But I point out that this exercise took no account of refurbishment or other costs associated with the changeover; it considered only the school buildings as they existed. So it was a very modest account.

That Weston Creek survey did, of course, look at existing staffing formulae and just transferred them across to new schools. It recognised costs such as heating, cleaning and maintenance, which are clearly the areas where most savings can be made, except that they are balanced out by additional costs elsewhere.

Dr Perkins' methodology compared the average cost per student in primary schools of more than 400 pupils with that per student in schools with fewer than 300 pupils. She found a difference of \$476 per child at 1990 prices. Assuming that the 18 primary schools with fewer than 300 pupils closed, this would save only \$1.9m a year. These are very small savings. There is still no account of the relocation costs and, with it all, massive disruption and loss of standards. Similarly, she found that closure of smaller high schools would bring savings of \$600,000 per annum. Let me emphasise again: those are the gross savings without the offsetting costs. These savings are negligible in terms of the damage that is done.

Let us look at the additional costs that this change will bring. Dr Perkins assessed the average cost of refurbishing closed schools or the schools that were being consolidated as being \$250,000. She assessed the figure for relocating demountables - and we all know that is very expensive - as \$100,000 per classroom. It was also suggested that additional counsellors would be needed to cope with the stress in children as a result of the change of school.

The Priorities Review Board document, although it does not give any elaboration anywhere, acknowledges that some capital expenditure is needed in the schools where children are being centralised. So there is an additional cost there and it has to be recognised. When that additional cost is noted, the probable losses are so serious that it is obvious that this Government's proposal must be stopped. Only if the property is sold is there any clear financial benefit, and that of course is a one-off benefit only. A long time ago, when these proposals were first announced, I said that they made sense only if the properties were to be sold. There is no logic or sense to it in any other circumstance.

Dr Perkins' study went on to consider the enormous financial impact of the necessary increase in bus services. I understand that the Minister proposes, or has started, a review of the bus services, so there is some more information to come. There is considerable potential for a much expanded cost, and Dr Perkins has put significant figures to that. I have not pressed that argument today because I probably know this Government better than Dr Perkins does and I do not believe that it would accept a great commitment to transporting children once a school had closed. So I have not used the bussing costs as a particular part of my argument today.

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There are further costs that Dr Perkins identifies. For example, there is the loss of community halls and recreation facilities. In some aspects, these are financial costs; in other aspects, they are social costs and they are very significant. Think of all the activity that goes on in and around your local school. Think of the scout groups and the church groups that you will turf out of the space that they use after hours. That is a considerable cost. Finally, she points to the cost of the loss of educational quality - a cost that simply cannot be assessed.

I want to quickly mention again that Weston Creek study. Looking only at existing premises, it ascertained that by 1994 savings immediately would range from \$34,000 per annum to \$260,000 per annum over the four new schools, depending on the enrolments. That is related to Mr Humphries' figure of about \$200,000 to \$250,000 a school. That is a remarkably small saving to justify the exercise he has embarked upon. That figure seems to rise regularly. Of course, from that \$200,000 we must now take all the add-on costs of relocation - the demountables, the refurbishing and probably the buses. So, the \$250,000 savings that might be made will diminish very suddenly.

It becomes clearer and clearer that there are no real savings at all in terms of money in all these school closures. Clearly these documents demonstrate an urgent need for a further study so that we can determine reliable figures. In question time Mr Humphries has given non-answers. He cannot go down that path because he has not got those answers. He does not know how much he wants to save; he does not know how much he can save. He does not have that information across the system or over individual schools. All he wants is a reserve of available funds into which he can dip with a very heavy hand whenever the Chief Minister requires it. He is acting blindly. He intends to close up to 25 schools on the most doubtful information. He does not know where he is going. We do. He is going to destroy our system for very unlikely gains. (Extension of time granted)

We have evidence of an Education Department study that would seem to be the most casual that is available. We have two cost-benefit studies here that lead the way. Let us go down that path and get some reliable figures. Mr Humphries should pull out this whole proposal so that we can examine it in some detail.

The ALP looks at schools and these related questions purely on educational grounds. On that basis, there is no justification for closures. The Government looks at schools on economic grounds. But even on that basis there is enough evidence from these studies - and from Mr Humphries' own words - to question the economic benefit. Even on that criterion, schools should not close.

MR HUMPHRIES (Minister for Health, Education and the Arts) (10.50): Mr Speaker, we have seen a fairly clear indication today of the joys of being in opposition - being able to articulate a point of view that taps into a vein of anxiety and concern on the part of the community, without the attendant responsibility that comes with being in government of having to pay for and cost the sorts of alternatives that necessarily flow from the rejection of particular options. That is exactly what is happening in this case today.

The Labor Party says that the Government is wrong. Labor members reject the idea of making savings in education despite the fact that when they were in government they made a very considerable attempt to make savings in education. Nonetheless, apparently their savings were genuine, thoughtful, caring cuts and ours are thoughtless, heartless, uncostered, lacking in compassion types of cuts. When we get down to the bone of things, we realise that the sorts of cuts that Labor made in government directly affected the quality of education being provided in our schools.

These included cuts in the numbers of relief teaching hours available in our school system, cuts in the numbers of teachers available in the secondary college system and an attendant increase in the average class sizes in those colleges, and cuts in the numbers of relief teachers available to engage in activities such as school sport, for which Ms Follett criticised me the other day. What effrontery! A whole series of measures were taken by the previous Government which directly affected the quality of education available in this Territory. That is not the path that this Government has chosen to take.

We have instead preferred a course of action which, we believe, will retain the quality of education in our system by reducing the infrastructure costs and reducing the waste and inefficiency inherent in a large number of schools with large capacities and small numbers of students in them. That is a sensible course of action to take. It is a course of action being adopted not just by this Government but by governments all over Australia.

It may interest members opposite to know that in the last 10 years or so about 1,000 schools have been closed all over this country by both Liberal and Labor governments. There is plenty of evidence to show that, to be adaptable to the needs of the twenty-first century, we have to start planning and adapting our resources. We simply cannot retain education institutions once built as temples of education on the assumption that, having opened a school door, it should never close, irrespective of the numbers of students that might be accommodated in that school. That is simply a stupid point of view, but is a point of view put by Labor members opposite.

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Let us look at the facts in this matter. Mr Wood asked for some facts; I will give him some. In our education system in the ACT at present there are 1,700 unused places in our preschools; 7,500 in our primary schools; 3,000 in our high schools; and about 1,100 in our colleges. There are huge numbers of unused places, places which, however, we continue to light, heat and provide power to. We continue to provide support in the form of principals and janitors; we provide computer lines; we maintain the ovals and the other grounds around the schools. A whole series of costs flow from the fact that there are empty spaces in our schools, all of which we continue to service with no educational benefit to the students in our system.

There is no educational benefit in maintaining empty places. That is why this Government has decided to take up that issue. We have to identify that surplus capacity and trim it down so that we can concentrate resources on actually providing education to our students. That is the priority we have chosen for ourselves.

I want also to dispel some misapprehensions being generated very actively by the Opposition - which is very good at doing that these days - spreading fear and loathing and half-truths among the community. I want to make very clear just what it is that they are telling fibs about. First of all they are suggesting that there will be a massive explosion in the size of schools in the ACT; that we will see what one newspaper report the other day described as "school factories" - huge, faceless, anonymous institutions that will destroy the spirit of education and irreparably damage the education of our children.

Mr Berry: You will not tell us what is going to happen. You do not know. You told the people at school the other night that you did not know.

MR HUMPHRIES: I do know, Mr Berry; I do know. The Government is not talking about creating average school sizes that are larger than those that already exist in the ACT.

Mr Berry: Well, what size schools are you going to create? Tell us.

MR HUMPHRIES: I will tell you, Mr Berry, as I explained the other day. Mr Speaker, could I have some silence? I appreciate hearing Mr Berry's views on other occasions, but I would rather hear mine at the moment.

MR SPEAKER: Order! May I suggest that you do not respond to his interjections.

MR HUMPHRIES: When they are extremely stupid it is hard to avoid putting them down, Mr Speaker. The Government is talking about creating primary schools of a size between 400 and 600 pupils approximately, and high schools of a size between 800 and 1,000 pupils approximately.

Mr Berry: So everything below that is gone.

MR HUMPHRIES: No, that is not the case, Mr Berry. The point is that schools of those sizes already exist in the Australian Capital Territory. They already function and provide a high quality of education. When those opposite attack schools of that size, they are in fact attacking the quality of education already being provided by schools of that size in the ACT. They are saying, by implication, that our larger schools cannot provide a high-quality education. I say, "Shame on the Opposition. If you believe that, you are seriously deluded about the quality that is possible throughout our system, and you are using your arguments to slur the education system generally".

There is ample capacity for the ACT to have larger average school sizes. I point to the fact that every other State in Australia has school sizes considerably larger than those of the ACT and manages somehow to sustain a reasonable quality of education at the same time. I would not say that they sustain the same high quality that we sustain, but I do not believe that is necessarily a feature or a function of the size of the school. It is, of course, a feature of many factors. It flows from many things that are good about our system, including the quality of our teachers, the quality of our curriculum development and a whole range of other factors. It is those sorts of things that this Government wants to preserve and that is why we are trimming the costs of running the system in other areas to preserve those essential, basic, fundamental strengths of our system.

An interesting argument has been put forward by the Opposition to the effect that the closures will wreak havoc in the system. Those were Mr Wood's words. Opposition members say that we are destroying public education in the ACT. I ask them exactly what feature of these changes causes that to occur? Is it larger schools? Is it the mere fact of having larger schools that creates this great problem? Apparently not, because we already have schools of that size, and they do not provide inferior quality education to their students, so that cannot be the case. Is it because we are actually closing some schools that have already existed? Well, we are not the first government to close schools in the ACT. I do not recall Ms Follett, as a public figure as she then was, complaining publicly about the closure of five schools by the Federal Government in 1988.

Ms Follett: I did.

MR HUMPHRIES: Well, perhaps you complained as you did about the conviction of Mr DUBY the other day. None of us actually saw it, I am afraid to say. The reality is that there was not much of a from the members of the Labor Party about that. They acknowledged, and their Federal colleagues certainly acknowledged, that from time to time

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we have got to trim the size of our schools, particularly when they become so small as to pose a risk to the quality of education they can provide. I will come back to the question of quality in a moment. So I do not think we can say that merely closing small schools necessarily defeats or destroys the quality of education.

The suggestion has been made that the destruction of the neighbourhood school concept somehow damages education quality. That is an interesting argument. It is a suggestion which, I must say, did not come forward to me in the course of my consultation with the education community before these criteria were announced. I asked them to indicate what they felt was essentially important about the education system, what made it so good. There was very little reference to this point. The point that was made repeatedly was that there should be no increase in class sizes. It should not escape the attention of members opposite that the strategy that the Government is presently pursuing will have the effect of not increasing class sizes across the board in the Territory. That is one of the benefits of this system, which apparently they are unwilling to acknowledge.

I talked about the neighbourhood school principle and said that this was somehow important to the maintenance of educational quality in the ACT. That would surely mean that those schools in the ACT which do not operate on the neighbourhood school principle do not provide the same quality of education as those that do. The reality is that at least half of all students in the ACT do not attend government neighbourhood schools. A third of the students in the ACT do not attend government schools at all, of course; and about a quarter of those who do, do not attend the school in their own neighbourhood. They go to a school elsewhere - an out-of-area school - because they choose to do so, for various reasons. There are many reasons for that choice. Sometimes it is convenience, sometimes they prefer what is being offered at that school.

This points to the fact that we can still provide a high quality of education even where the neighbourhood school principle, as presently defined, does not apply. I, of course, think it is very important - and the Government shares this view - that we have schools that are responsive to their local communities. But all we are talking about here is how you define the neighbourhood that serves that school. Presently, "neighbourhood" means a suburb, as defined by the Territory's planners over many years, as bounded by a certain number of roads. That constitutes the "neighbourhood".

Mr Wood: A very strong part of our city's design, isn't it?

MR HUMPHRIES: I suggest that our city's design is equally responsive to other definitions of "neighbourhood". We well respond to what we call "community schools", schools

that are quite capable of taking in the surrounding community, slightly larger defined, and serving the needs of that community. There is no reason for people to lose the ability to use school halls or other community facilities merely because they are no longer served by a particular school.

Those things are all going to be within easy reach of the local community - considerably easier reach than they would be anywhere else in Australia. We will still have smaller average school sizes by urban comparisons than any other city in Australia and we will still have access to very near regional facilities of that kind.

Mr Wood made one final reference to something which he might argue was contributing to the destruction of education in the ACT. He said that the massive disruption of this change would somehow destroy educational quality. I acknowledge that the change is disrupting. I acknowledge that it is not convenient or acceptable to some people for those changes to occur. To them I apologise for that inconvenience, but I regret that a system which needs to adapt to changing circumstances cannot be free of change. In some cases that means having to inconvenience some people.

From the time that I have spent talking to teachers, parents and pupils at the schools that were amalgamated at the end of 1988, I am not convinced that the changes that occurred then were entirely negative or entirely without a positive feature.

Mr Berry: What percentage were negative and what percentage were positive?

MR HUMPHRIES: It was about fifty-fifty, Mr Berry. I think about 50 per cent of the comments were positive and about 50 per cent were negative.

Mr Berry: Anecdotal efforts.

MR HUMPHRIES: Well, they are anecdotal. I suggest that you go out and talk to members of the same sort of community and find out what they are thinking. The comments that I received were, in many cases, positive about the new arrangements and they were enthusiastic about the additional choices that were possible within schools with more resources. That is what we are talking about - giving schools more resources. Those resources flow from the fact the schools have larger pupil numbers and therefore greater resources at their disposal. (Extension of time granted)

There has been reference to the work done by Dr Perkins. I do not want to go into any detail about Dr Perkins' work at this stage because work is being done on that by both the ACT Education Department and the ACT Treasury. I am very happy to bring forward the findings of that work. I am not

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inflexible about the way in which savings are identified. If we can be shown not to be making the savings in this process, naturally I will put to the Government that we will have to reconsider.

The reality is that there are savings to be made in this sort of consolidation; there is no getting away from that fact. There were considerable savings made at the end of 1988 - of the order of \$1.2m. Those are not illusory, make-believe figures; they are actual savings that flowed from the closure of five schools. I think it would be worth while for the Opposition to examine those figures in order to understand what it is we are talking about.

Mr Wood: Will you provide them for us?

MR HUMPHRIES: I have already provided them to many other groups. If you have not asked for them, you can do so and you will get them.

Mr Wood: I did ask some time ago and never got them.

MR HUMPHRIES: I am sorry; I will pursue the matter and get them to you. There are three matters that I want to refer to briefly in Dr Perkins' study. I do not question the methodology that Dr Perkins has used - she is obviously eminently capable of doing that - but I think we must be very sure that we agree on the criteria, the assumptions that she uses to reach a number of her conclusions.

For example, she has probably overestimated the requirement for school bussing as a result of those changes. She has certainly overestimated the number of demountable schoolrooms required in the larger schools. She has assumed that every school would require a demountable school building when, in fact, in the round of 1988 closures, most schools did not. She ignores the fact that there is a very large surplus capacity already in the schools.

The third and fairly serious point on which we have to reach agreement is the extent to which the capital assets freed up by the sale of schools can be turned into money to pay for some of the capital refurbishment necessary to accommodate the new arrangements in some schools. If we were thinking of taking all our costs of refurbishing schools from our recurrent budget, we would certainly have a problem.

There is no question that the sale of some school buildings will generate capital revenue which can be put back into the refurbishment of school buildings. That is a capital cost staying in the capital cost category. Dr Perkins seems to assume that all our capital works will come from our recurrent budget. I do not want to go into any more detail about Dr Perkins because I believe it is inappropriate before we have actually had a good look at the figures.

My final point is to do with the budget realities that the ACT presently faces. I said before that the Opposition was presenting us with a typical "all care, no responsibility" set of advice on how the ACT was going to find its way out of its problems. But, if one looks carefully at what the Labor Party has been giving to the ACT in the way of advice over the last few weeks, one really finds that our room to manoeuvre is extremely small.

First of all, we have the Federal Minister for Finance advising us that there is overspending of the order of \$100m. Now, apparently, members of the Australian Labor Party are telling us to ignore that advice.

Mr Wood: Will you table the advice he has given you?

MR HUMPHRIES: It is in Hansard. Mr Speaker, apparently members opposite do not want to believe their own former Federal Labor Minister for Finance. I think he is no longer in that position, more because of his truthfulness than anything else.

Mr Wood: I would like to see that documentation.

MR HUMPHRIES: You might not have documentation for a while, Mr Wood. The question is not so much whether we have documentation; the question is what the Federal Government intends to do on the assumptions that it makes about how much the ACT is overfunded. That is the issue. The former Federal Finance Minister claims that we are \$100m overfunded. That may or may not be the right figure but it is certainly the one that the Federal Government is working to at present. I am alerted to the fact that the present Minister for Territories, David Simmons, has not done anything at all to cause us to rethink our position in that regard and he indicated very recently - on 20 April this year - that we should be very careful about making assumptions that things are not as bad as they might seem. He suggested that, if we made such assumptions, we were in for a big shock because that is not the reality. He talked about not being able to put things off and the fact that in tough economic times people expected governments to make tough decisions. That is a pretty clear signal, Mr Speaker.

So we have Senator Walsh's advice that we are \$100m short. Then we have Mr Hawke's advice to the Chief Minister that no extensions will be granted in the period of transition for the ACT. We have a big problem to face and we are not going to have any extra time to face it. What do we do about the problem? This morning Senator McMullan advised us that increasing taxes and charges is reprehensible. That is not quite the same thing as Ms Follett said. She is on the record as saying that the Government ought to be increasing taxes and charges.

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Senator McMullan says that we cannot increase taxes and charges. Ms Follett says that we cannot cut services. What she means by that is we cannot reduce expenditure on any services because she claims that, if we reduce expenditure, we must necessarily decrease the quality of services - a pretty debatable assumption. She says that we cannot cut the quality of services or reduce the size of the public service. She constantly complains about our threats to the number of jobs available in our ACT public service.

Where are we left to go? What is the ACT supposed to do? We cannot reduce our expenditure, we cannot raise our revenue and we cannot get any joy from the Federal Government. We are in a bind. What are we supposed to do? Pray? Mr Langmore, the member for Fraser, has a helpful suggestion - - -

Mr Wood: You are supposed to know what you are doing.

MR HUMPHRIES: We are supposed to know what we are doing. That is the advice of Mr Wood. We cannot raise revenue, we cannot reduce expenditure, but if we know what we are doing, somehow it will all sort itself out.

Mr Langmore's advice is for us to reorder our priorities. How? Mr Langmore is not available to comment, so we do not know what the answer is. The Opposition's position is typical of that of any opposition. It is without responsibility. We do not have that luxury in government. We have to make some hard decisions, and that is precisely what we are doing.

MR MOORE (11.12): The question we must ask about school closures is: what are the real goals of this Government? It then becomes quite clear that it has no idea what occurs under the sorts of plans it has in both education and health. There will be a major movement of people from the public to the private sector. That will happen in education. Numbers of people have told me that that is exactly what they will do with their children - move them into the private sector - because at least that way they will have some certainty. The same is true of hospitals. While we are closing a 150-bed hospital because we have got too much hospital space, we are now about to spend \$150m on opening another similar sized private hospital - - -

Mr Humphries: No, we are not spending that. It is a private hospital. We do not spend any money on that.

MR MOORE: That is right, but suddenly we find that we are going to need those spaces. They will be provided by the private sector, but we are told we do not need those spaces in the public sector.

Mr Humphries: We are not cutting any public hospital beds to do that.

MR MOORE: You are. What we have is a methodology which transfers the services from the public sector to the private sector. In principle and conceptually, this Government has failed to reach any goals in terms of social justice and equity. That is the anti-social-justice team across there.

Mr Collaery: What a joke! This is the bloke who broke ranks and insisted on a car.

MR MOORE: Mr Collaery draws attention to breaking ranks and insisting on a car when he drives a Fairlane with a phone in it. I love it! Members of the anti-social-justice and anti-equity team over there have no idea what it is all about. They have made their decisions and set their priorities in terms of economics and economics alone, instead of setting out a series of social goals. They have failed to establish their framework; they have failed to set out their structure in consultation with the people of Canberra. They have failed as a government and they will continue failing. If they had set out their priorities in terms of social goals - and this goes back to Mr Langmore's point - then they could work out where they were going to spend money and where the community wanted to see cuts. Members opposite would not then have found this massive move in the community to unseat them, to unload them, to get rid of them. The people are sick of this Government. They do not trust it because it is anti-social-justice. The community recognises that.

Education is one of our main methods of ensuring and retaining long-term social justice because public education provides people, irrespective of their background, with the opportunity of making their contribution to our society. That is what this Government is missing out on. Mr Humphries was very keen to provide us with some facts and to talk about the \$1.2m saving that was made by the closure of schools a couple of years ago. In early April there was a request to Mr Humphries from the P and C to provide a breakdown on that \$1.2m savings.

Mr Humphries: They have got it.

MR MOORE: They have finally got that breakdown?

Mr Humphries: Yes, some time ago.

MR MOORE: According to the P and C last week they still did not have a satisfactory breakdown. Mr Humphries himself was dissatisfied with what his department had provided as a breakdown of that \$1.2m and an indication of where those savings had been made. Mr Humphries tells me now that the breakdown is available; he has told Mr Wood he will provide him with it. Mr Humphries has always provided me with anything that I have requested up to now, so I presume that he will also provide a satisfactory breakdown so that we can do a critical analysis of it. Will you assure me, Mr Humphries, that I will have that as soon as possible?

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MR SPEAKER: Order, Mr Moore! Ask your question through the Chair.

MR MOORE: Through you, Mr Speaker, I ask Mr Humphries. He assured me in an interjection a minute ago that the breakdown was now available. Less than a week ago I was told by an executive member of the P and C that they did not have those figures.

The real question that we need to ask is: what are our overall social goals? The anti-social-justice Government has not provided the terms of its overall social goals. In education it has proposed an economic solution without any educational justification at all. We still have heard no educational justification for the closure of these schools. There are plenty of educational justifications for keeping them as they are.

The first and the most important of those is to do with morale. One only had to talk to people in the Page area after the Page school closure to be aware of morale. Most of the students were expected to go from Page to Scullin, yet Scullin's enrolments rose by only 50. What will happen here when we have a wholesale set of closures and the students do not go where you want them to go? It is all very well to draw lines and figures on the map. This has happened once already and the same situation will arise with these students. Instead of going to the school that is nearest to them, that supposedly has enough room, they will go off to other places. Then we have to put other restrictions on where students can go and what choices they can make. Therefore, the whole notion of choice suddenly falls down in a screaming heap.

In the meantime you have students, parents and teachers who are all distressed. Where are the changes going to take place next? What happens to the education system when there is low morale among its teaching staff? The same thing happens when you get low morale in the public service or in a business - it starts to fold up and it does not operate the way it should. And there is low morale in the education system. Morale was low under Labor and it is getting even lower under the anti-social-justice Government that is in office at the moment.

What do the students say about this? I have great joy in reading from a letter that I received just yesterday from a grade 1 student, Erin Cameron Smith, from Ainslie Primary. I shall pass a copy of it to the Minister. It says, "Dear Sir, I don't want the school to close. It is a good school and that is why I like it".

There is a very deep philosophical basis to that grade 1 student's letter. I think it is very important that at least somebody has started to try to find out what the students think. Yesterday I was at Ginninderra High School, which is the largest high school in Belconnen, with more than 900 students. It has had up to 1,000 students.

What happens physically in schools that are not designed to operate with greater numbers? I am not exactly a small person - I think this was probably arranged carefully - and I was in the stairwell at the time of a lesson change. It was only by grasping the handrail very tightly that I was not bowled all the way down to the bottom of the stairs.

I have taught in high schools which have far greater numbers - more than 2,000 in Canada - and those schools have corridors that are three times as wide as normal and have a series of other designs to ensure that they can handle that number of students. Our schools are not designed that way. What you are trying to do is force too many students into schools that are not designed for large numbers.

The president of the Ginninderra SRC spoke to an assembly of the students on school closures, and I will quote some of her speech. She said:

The Government sees the area of public education as one where large cuts can be made.

She then spoke about Mr Humphries at the Weetangera meeting, and said:

I thought his answers were unsatisfactory to the numerous questions being asked. It was also obvious that Mr Humphries has no children, no empathy for education and public education in particular.

Further, she said:

The Government thinks that by closing some schools in the ACT they will save money by having bigger schools. No school is safe.

The people of Erindale were happy to invite me out to their school and I understand they have invited numerous other members as well. I was there with Mr Langmore. I know that Mr Humphries has been invited and I hope he takes the opportunity to go out there to see what happens in a school. (Extension of time granted)

At Ginninderra we have a school which is overstocked, it has more students than it is designed for and, whilst it has a good quality education, it has a lot of problems. People recognise that those problems do not have to exist when the schools are used in the way in which they were designed. In fact, with fewer students they could have a better quality education, and that is the reality of the situation.

Mr Humphries: What about these small schools, Michael? What about the schools with 140 students?

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MR MOORE: I have taught in small schools; I know the advantages and disadvantages. I could spend some time talking to you about the advantages. The reality of the situation is that, from an educational perspective, the disadvantages are far outweighed by the advantages. If you do not believe that, go and talk to the parents who send their kids to those schools.

I accept that not all teachers will agree with that. That is true, because often teachers will have more work in a smaller school. Sometimes they will have more work in a bigger school. But members ought to talk to those teachers at Ginninderra High School as well and see how they feel about the overcrowding, how they feel about a staffroom that is half the size of this room but has to cater for 40 people.

We now come to the facts that Mr Humphries was supposedly going to tell us. We have still got this ridiculous concept, this lie that the Government keeps forcing on the people of Canberra, that we have this incredible number of spare spaces. That is only true in the same concept that we have 50 or 60 spare spaces in this Assembly. That is a nonsense. It is a nonsense concept about the Assembly and it is a nonsense concept about the schools.

I refer to page 61 of the annual report that was tabled by Mr Humphries in this Assembly. It says, "There is now little surplus space in ACT public school system". That was tabled by Mr Humphries, who is now going to distinguish between "space" and "places". How do you work out the number of places? This is the argument that Mr Humphries presented at a meeting at Hackett the other night. There is a difference between space and places. Places are worked out by establishing the space and, in the case of high schools, multiplying by 19, and in the case of primary schools, by 30 - or whatever figure the department decides to tell you.

The point is that we are talking about exactly the same thing, and what we have here is a snow job. You as Ministers are being snowed, you are being misled and you want to be very careful that you do not do the same to this house, because that is considered a particularly serious matter. If I thought a censure motion would work, if I thought I could unload this Government by any of those methods to protect the public education system to give some social justice to this community, I would not hesitate to do so.

MS MAHER (11.26): Much has been said about small schools in Canberra, yet Canberra has no schools that were intended to be small. Canberra schools were built to run efficiently with 400, 500 or even 600 students. In the public discussion there has been a lack of realisation of the fact that the Canberra schools which now have enrolments of only 200 or 300 children previously had twice as many. The fact that those schools were excellent has

never been questioned. In fact, it was at a time when those schools had much higher numbers of students that Canberra earned its reputation of having the best public school system in Australia. It is interesting to look at how the numbers of school students dropped quickly in Canberra suburbs about 10 to 15 years after the areas were first settled.

At Downer, for example, the school had 884 students in 1969. This number had dropped to 155 before the school was closed during the 1988 amalgamations. In Woden Valley, about 5,200 students were attending the primary schools in 1984. Today, only 2,000 local children attend those schools, with another 500 coming from out of the area. Even in newer areas, such as Weston Creek, school populations have dropped by half or more since the late 1970s. I do not want to mention any school by name because it would be unfair in the present circumstances, but overall the primary school population has fallen from a peak of more than 3,900 in 1978 to less than 1,700 in the census in February this year. It is the same story in Belconnen and is starting to be repeated in older parts of Tuggeranong.

It is easy to criticise the planners who built large schools to cater for large numbers of children in new suburbs where young families can afford to live, only to see those schools become costly to run as populations become older. As we spend millions of dollars building new school facilities to cater for the residents in Canberra's developing areas, we have to question whether we can afford to maintain more than 13,000 spare places. We need to be realistic and responsive.

Some people have voiced their concern that schools may have to be reopened when the number of children rises again in those suburbs. Experience shows that this is unlikely but, just in case, the current review allows for a 10 per cent buffer of surplus capacity in all regions. The reason why school populations are unlikely ever to reach their previous levels is interesting demographically and has to do with simple family economics. As Canberra suburbs become older and more developed, they become more expensive to buy into. Young couples beginning their families cannot afford to buy houses in older areas and instead go to newer, cheaper suburbs. When they get older, perhaps when some or all of their children are off their hands, they may then buy houses in older areas which are more expensive.

It is true that some young couples may buy houses in older areas, but the figures show that couples who make the decision to buy these relatively more expensive properties tend to have fewer children than the couples who settle in newer suburbs. Demographic figures produced by the ACT Administration over many years bear out the fact that the fertility rate of women of child-bearing age living in older suburbs is well below that of women of a similar age group living in outer, newer suburbs. It should also be

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noted that there are far fewer women of child-bearing age as a proportion of the population of older suburbs. These facts lead us to the obvious conclusion that schools that may be closed will not need to be opened again.

When schools are closed children will not be denied access to a local school. They will not have to go across town, because we will still have community schools. We will still be the envy of all other States and we will still have the best education system in the country. These facts underlie the fact that the school consolidation program is people driven just as much as it is budget driven. It is about government being responsive and providing services where people need them.

People obviously get attached to the schools which they have lived near and which either they have attended or their children have attended or are still attending. However, I ask the community whether it is fair to deprive the current generation of students of a proper, balanced education system just for the sake of maintaining capital stock as a sort of monument to our education. The Alliance Government is committed to quality - - -

Mr Moore: It does not have to be a choice like that. Set your priorities.

Mr Doby: Shut up, you dope.

Mr Moore: On a point of order, Mr Speaker; Mr Doby has referred to me as a dope. I would like him to withdraw it.

MR SPEAKER: Please withdraw it if that was the case, Mr Doby.

Mr Doby: Mr Speaker, I was not referring to Mr Michael Moore personally. I was referring to the substance of his remarks.

MR SPEAKER: No, that does not qualify as a withdrawal.

Mr Doby: I withdraw it, Mr Speaker.

MS MAHER: The Alliance Government is committed to quality of education. The school consolidation program is an important part of the efforts to ensure that we can continue to afford quality education when the Commonwealth's special funding ceases in July next year. I believe that our school system does not have to deteriorate just because we may have to close some schools. The discussion paper which was put out by the Minister is just that - a discussion paper. Many schools and people are responding and putting in submissions. I have a son who is at present going through the ACT public school system, and I personally do not want to see the system deteriorate in any way, for his benefit and for that of all the other residents of the ACT.

His school - Spence school - took a very positive attitude nearly 12 months ago and recognised the fact that the ACT Government would have economic problems. Together with Melba school, it has submitted a proposal for a twin campus which - - -

Mr Moore: So you are feeling secure, are you?

MS MAHER: No, I am not, actually. The proposal will save the Government over \$80,000. Holder High School is putting in a proposal. The community out there is responding to the discussion paper and some good submissions are coming back. The Government will not do anything until we get those submissions, analyse them and see what we come up with. Therefore, the community is having an opportunity to have its say.

MS FOLLETT (Leader of the Opposition) (11.35): Mr Speaker, there is no doubt in the community's mind or in the minds of Opposition members that education in the ACT is under attack by the Liberal Government opposite. They might want to delude themselves that that is not the case, but it is.

The education system that the people of the ACT have known for years - some of us all our lives - and that has served the community so well, is being dismantled by the current Minister for Education. In fact, as we have heard today and we have heard repeatedly, Mr Humphries cannot tell us the savings that he expects to achieve, indeed even the target that he is going for, by this attack on the education system.

The ACT education system is highly respected throughout Australia. If you talk to people from any other State you will find that they envy our education system. It has the highest retention rate in Australia and it is unequalled in the percentage of students who go on to tertiary education. But of course all of that means absolutely nothing to the people opposite.

The ACT education system currently provides children with the environment in which their own personalities can fully develop and it gives them an education which gives them a chance to reach their full potential. We do at least have an obligation to offer our children a fulfilling future. Furthermore, a good education provides the ACT with a highly skilled work force. The Prime Minister has recently told us all of the need to create a clever nation. To date, the ACT has been at the forefront in providing the sorts of people that a clever nation needs.

But, Mr Speaker, what is important for the whole of the Australian economy is absolutely essential for the ACT. We do not have the primary and manufacturing industries that the other States have, so they will not be able to provide for our future. Our educated work force is, in fact, our greatest resource, and unless we continue to provide ourselves with an educated work force the ACT's future is bleak indeed.

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Of course, our schools have a more important role in Canberra than providing the base for our educated labour force. Reaction in the community to the closure of between 15 and 25 schools is not simply a reaction to a loss of educational value, as important as that is, of course; it is also a reaction by people of the ACT to the proposed loss of the neighbourhood school concept, the concept that has always been present in the ACT.

Residents of the ACT rightly believe that the school should play a major role in their local community. They believe, for instance, that their children are safer if they have to travel only a short distance to school rather than being forced to travel miles to a larger regional school. The residents also believe that their school is the centre of life for the community; it is a gathering place and a focus for community activities.

You only have to visit any of the suburbs in which schools have already been closed to know the impact that that has had on the whole life of the community. I live in Downer, where the school has been closed. The life of that community has been terribly altered by the fact that that school no longer exists. The shops are barely viable. The community activities that used to take place are much reduced. The whole of that neighbourhood has been altered by the fact that its school is no longer open. I should say - I notice that Mr Jensen is getting a bit edgy over there - that the closure of those schools in 1988 was undertaken over the protest of the local ACT branch of the Labor Party. We in no way condoned it.

Not only does Mr Humphries intend to devalue the education system by closing schools, but his planned sell-off of schools and their surrounding green areas threatens to deprive the community of the central recreation areas and indeed, in some suburbs, the only green space in those suburbs. One thing in this whole debate needs to be made abundantly clear. The closures talked about by Mr Humphries are not needed. The Minister is simply making random decisions with no clear goals - and we have seen that demonstrated again today - except to get as much money as possible in any way possible. He cannot tell us how much he wants to save, how much he thinks he might save, or indeed how he will make those savings.

The Minister's criteria, such as they are, are related to bricks and mortar, to enrolments, to costs. They are not, of course, related to anything educational. There is certainly nothing in the criteria about the well-being of the community's children and their families. In fact, Mr Humphries' criteria reflect totally wrong values. I would ask Mr Humphries: what about the quality programs in our schools, what about morale, what about the dedication of staff, what about the children's own achievements and their excitement at learning? Values like those have been simply thrown out of the window by this Minister and the Government.

Mr Speaker, the Labor position is that we recognise the value of education. Our policy on which we went to the election is that no school should close. We are not dealing with a budget issue. As Mr Wood has shown, the closure of schools will not save money; it may cost money; and in fact the money is there to maintain our schools. We have the Supply Bill before us today, Mr Humphries.

What is lacking on behalf of this Government is any sense of priority. The debate that we have at the moment is not about education; it is about ideology and it is about selling off schools for their real estate value. That has been made abundantly clear. In government, the Labor team stood by our promise not to close schools and we will continue to stand by that promise when we return to government.

The stupid thing about school closures is that they just will not work. People are not animals that can be herded from one school to another. In fact, when the Page school closed, as I think Mr Moore said, the students would not go to their new school. So it made an absolute mess of the well laid out plans of the education bureaucracy. That will happen again if further schools are closed. People want some degree of diversity in their schooling system. They want a mixture of small schools and large schools. It is possible to have quality education regardless of the size of school. There is a call for small schools. There are a great number of small schools.

I think it is absolutely typical of this Government that, on this crucial issue, there has been no real consultation with the community. The Minister has dictated what will occur; namely, the closure of schools. He has made that decision without any reference whatsoever to the community. This is extremely unfortunate because the community has shown itself only too willing to discuss the future of education in the ACT.

The community is willing to make a positive contribution to that debate. People do understand the issues, they understand the budget, they understand the ACT's financial position, and they are prepared to debate those issues. But they cannot debate with a gun at their heads. It is unfair to expect them to debate the future of ACT education when they have already been told that 25 schools will close. What sort of a debate is that? I say again, Mr Speaker, that the community is willing and able to debate the ACT's educational and budgetary needs. I wish that Mr Humphries and the Government would accept that, accept that the community has a role to play here and a valuable contribution to make.

I call on Mr Humphries to drop his proposal and to allow debate to take place without the threat, as is currently being placed on people, of total destruction of the current neighbourhood school system. People cannot debate in that

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atmosphere - it is not fair to expect them to do so - and I call on Mr Humphries to withdraw his current proposal, to hold the debate and to listen to the people who know the most about this issue; namely, the community that we are all here to serve.

MR STEFANIAK (11.45): I have listened with interest to a number of comments made by the Opposition. As probably the only member of this Assembly who went through the state school system in this town, from preschool through to high school and then university, I will shortly make a few comments on some of the points that Ms Follett raised which were quite wrong.

However, I would first like to comment on a couple of points made by Mr Moore, who referred to this Government as an anti-social-justice team. What a lot of rubbish! For a start, I think the term "social justice" itself is indeed a Labor term and, if it means fairness and equity, then, yes, that is what this Government is all about - fairness and equity for all. In terms of education, this Government is trying to provide a workable, efficient system for the Australian Capital Territory community, a system that will create equity and fairness to all. I think Mr Moore is very far off the mark when he refers to this Government as an anti-social-justice government. What a lot of rubbish!

Ms Follett has talked about a system that we have become used to over the years here in Canberra. I have got a few little historical anecdotes in relation to that, Mr Speaker. When I went through infants school and primary school we did not have one school we could go to for each suburb. The primary school I went to had children from about four or five suburbs, and when I went to Narrabundah High School we had kids coming in from Curtin, Lyons and Deakin because there were no schools there, as well as children from Red Hill, Narrabundah and the Causeway.

Indeed, it is interesting to note that, when Deakin and Woden Valley High Schools were built, those students who had come in from Curtin, Lyons, Deakin and Hughes to Narrabundah continued to do so, even though there were schools closer to their area then. So to say that we have had neighbourhood schools both at primary level and certainly at high school level in the past is quite wrong.

Ms Maher went through a number of reasons for the closure of Canberra schools. I think, if members of the Opposition were being fair dinkum and not just relying on the luxury of being in opposition and having a good whinge here today, they would realise that if they were in government they would have to look seriously at school closures just as this Government and our Education Minister, Mr Humphries, are doing.

It is interesting to note that there are a number of advantages that the reshaping project team, which consulted with regional directors and also with primary principals of

previously amalgamated schools, came up with in relation to amalgamations. On the positive side, a number of interesting comments were made. Firstly, the comment was made about the greater diversity of talent and professional expertise with a larger staff. Comments were made that it stimulated professional interchange and discussion, developed an awareness of educational issues and enhanced decision making and policy development. It also provided the opportunity for individual teachers to nominate their curriculum skills and interest to work in particular areas of curriculum development.

A further advantage was seen in changes in philosophy, curriculum and school policies. Amalgamation provided the opportunity for the community, parents and teachers to review their educational philosophy and beliefs and to have those incorporated into the new school charter, choosing to retain what was considered best in the previous schools. They would have greater opportunities for collegial and collaborative operations.

Another advantage was the opportunity to provide additional curriculum options. Specialist programs were possible and economical with larger numbers of students. There were advantages in playground supervision and extracurricular duties. Generally, the larger the staff, the easier it is to spread the load. In addition, out-of-class activities were possible because the workload had been spread amongst a greater number of teachers. Yet another advantage identified was greater flexibility for class placements for students. When there are a number of classes at the one year level this provides the opportunity to keep social and developmental groups together or indeed to separate groups if that is felt to be desirable.

A further advantage was a consolidation of resources. The amalgamations resulted in enhanced resources for the new school, particularly for valuable and expensive items like computers, pianos, video recorders and library books. Indeed, it was ascertained that a lot of older schools also had a lot of out-of-date stock. Also, in relation to financial allocations, the larger per capita grants resulting from a bigger school population allowed greater flexibility in budgeting.

Also, on the question of amalgamations of high schools, some advantages were ascertained from the principals of those schools. Those included refurbishment of some areas; equipment gains; library computerisation; opportunity for rethinking and renewal; impetus for change; some very able, committed students to swell the ranks; access to a larger group for potential new friends, membership of sporting teams and big bands; and access to broader curriculum offerings and excursion programs.

In considering the need to close some schools, there are a number of ways in which education expenditure can be cut. Educational programs could be reduced, but this would

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result in the lowering of educational standards in the ACT. That is seen by the Government as a totally unacceptable option. In the ACT schools system \$1m is the cost of 30 teaching places. Reducing the number of teachers and increasing class sizes would save a considerable amount of money but would result in the lowering of educational standards and less choice of educational programs.

The Government believes it is preferable to increase the cost-effectiveness of schools by economising on the running costs of schools rather than to cut or reduce educational programs or levels of staff, and that does, unfortunately, mean amalgamating schools.

I think a magic figure of 400 has been bandied about - will the school be closed because its enrolment is below 400? But the number of students enrolled in a school is only one of the criteria to be considered when decisions are made on which schools are to be amalgamated. It is the Government's aim to have primary schools of a size which is economical and which enables good educational programs to be conducted. That means creating primary schools of about 400 to 600 students and high schools of about 800 to 1,000 students. That is what Canberra schools were based on when they were built and certainly those are the sorts of figures that I remember from my days in the state school system here. In fact, on some occasions the numbers were even higher than that.

Size is only one criterion and, schools currently smaller than the above sizes may be preferred when other factors, such as the distance children have to travel to school and the quality of school buildings, are taken into account. Canberra is proud of its education system, and the quality of education provided by all schools probably is the best in Australia. All ACT students do receive a good education whether they attend primary schools which have as many as 560 students, such as Wanniasa, or 540, such as the popular Lyneham Primary School or go to schools with fewer than 200, like the 148-odd who attend the Hackett Primary School. They still receive a good education.

There is a similar disparity in the size of enrolments at high schools but educational outcomes are high at all schools. It is widely recognised, however, that larger schools have greater opportunity for staffing flexibility and for wider use of their more plentiful resources, as I indicated earlier.

As the population of Canberra grows older, the number of school age children decreases, as Ms Maher said. I am not going to go into any of her figures, but it is a fact of life that some areas of Canberra developed over the years, initially, with a lot of school age children. The Woden Valley and inner Canberra suburbs are classic examples. As the children grow up, the population becomes older and, accordingly, there are smaller numbers at a lot of Canberra schools because of the demography. That is something that

any government has to face, and this Government is facing it responsibly.

There are a couple of other instances which Ms Maher mentioned. Weston Creek Primary School enrolments, for example, dropped from a peak of 3,900 in 1978 to fewer than 1,800 in 1990. The trend is similar in other areas of Canberra. While the educational quality is high in all Canberra public schools, the cost of running the large schools with small enrolments is much greater on a per student basis than it is when greater numbers of students are enrolled.

In many ways, Mr Speaker, this debate is a little like the hospital debate. People naturally get very upset at the concept of closing the Royal Canberra Hospital and not using that as a principal hospital facility. I think a lot of emotion comes into a debate such as that. A number of people have told me, "Oh, but Woden Valley isn't as good as Royal Canberra; the service you get there isn't as good". I think there is an important point there. A hospital, or a school, is a building. It is the people who make up a school or a hospital who are important. The people who provide the service, be they nurses, doctors or teachers, and the people who use the services - in the case of schools, the students - are the important factors. Indeed, if the staff are good and the pupils are keen to learn, you have a good school, regardless of where it is or what size it is. I think that is something we should not forget in this debate.

MR COLLAERY (Attorney-General)(11.54): Mr Speaker, I think my first task should be to put down some of the myths that have been raised here today. One of the clearest myths that has been put out has been that this exercise has some ideological twist to it; that this Government is against the government schools system. Clearly, on this side of the house, we have the numbers on those issues. You have just heard Mr Stefaniak give a resounding speech in support of the government schools system, and two of us have wives who are members of the Teachers Federation and who teach in the system. Between them, the three Rally members have nine children who either have gone or are going through the government schools system at the moment. So do not tell us that there is an ideological twist about the Liberal Party, the Residents Rally, or anyone else in this exercise. I will come back to the ideology of it in a moment.

Firstly, I believe we should see this debate in perspective. The perspective is self-government and our budgetary problems; the problem of setting priorities in the budget and the social realities of continuing with a good social conscience on an important issue. Education - as Mr Wood has often recognised - is the path to economic and social advancement. But that path cannot be driven haphazardly or aggressively through other areas of social responsibility. What we hear very clearly and constantly from the ALP - and of course that limpet that sticks to it

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under the waterline - is that education must be quarantined from the budget. I want to make one thing clear. I am also the welfare and community services Minister. How do you think I feel and how do you think my community services people and the welfare carers feel about those statements?

There are no empty places in any of the welfare programs that I administer; there is nothing but stress and strain, misery and disadvantage. Yet we have a Labor Party committing itself in a serious budget problem to preferential treatment to one sector of the community. I will come back to that, in terms of the irony of their image on social justice, as they call it.

Certainly, I have been with a lot of dedicated carers and community groups recently. They are not up in arms at the moment but they will be if this Labor Party continues to fail to speak to that silent, undemonstrative population in the ACT: the disabled, the dying and the destitute who are being totally ignored. Not one of the ALP speakers today has mentioned the disadvantaged schools. Not one of you has mentioned the after-school care system. Not one of you spoke of anything but your comfortable little bourgeois precepts that you have developed in this town. There is more social justice on this side of the floor than you will ever have, and I will tell you where that is coming from. You are going to learn up to 1992 that we can carry your program miles further than you could ever carry it. We will do it better and we will have a shaped budget as well. Come on, take your medicine - - -

Ms Follett: And more criminal justice too!

Mr Berry: Yes, 25 per cent of your Cabinet are crooks and 20 per cent of your Government are crooks.

MR COLLAERY: Mr Speaker, make him stand up if he has got a point.

MR SPEAKER: Order! I will ask for a withdrawal of that, please, Mr Berry.

Mr Berry: I withdraw.

MR COLLAERY: Mr Speaker, the people on this side of the house have very strong convictions. We sure do and we are going to see them through. You aberrant ALP types who have drifted off from the Labor stream in this country will get a big serve in the next two years. You will learn that we can reply to the Burdekin report, we can provide youth housing initiatives, we can set up youth advisory ministerial committees, we can create a schools council, we can get rid of all your collectivisation and Marxist ideas. We will do so. They will be dismantled.

Ms Follett: I raise a point of order, Mr Speaker.

MR COLLAERY: She is insulted because I called her a Marxist.

Ms Follett: I am not insulted at all by being called a Marxist, but I do object to the irrelevance of these comments, Mr Speaker.

MR SPEAKER: Please stick to the point, Mr Collaery.

MR COLLAERY: Mr Speaker, I would have expected the Leader of the Opposition to "Marx" my words! Certainly, we are trying to make more comprehensible the need to increase services, increase revenue and attend to concerns in society.

One of the other myths that has been spoken about is the overemphasis on the ideological exploitation of this issue. We have seen frothing at the mouth sessions all over town. The roo from Reid has been jumping up and down and popping up all round the Bush Capital, and certainly this has presented that potoroo with a tremendous opportunity.

But let me put forward a couple of issues. I quote from Mr Kaine's speech yesterday on the Priorities Review Board. At page 4 of his speech he stated unequivocally, "The Government has invited comment on the need to restructure the school system". He went on to say - and I want everyone on the other side to hear this - "In releasing for public comment our suggested criteria for a consolidation program".

The trouble with the Opposition is that one cannot even make a suggestion before one gets shot down. Its members look for a stage, they look for a stunt at every turn because of the decrepit nature of their operation at the moment. Certainly, Rosemary Richards of the Teachers Federation has recognised that there may be a need for school closures. The trade union movement is taking a far more responsible approach on this issue. But not the Opposition members; no, all we get from them are cheap shots.

On the question of whether anyone has been constructive on this issue, let me tell you what the Government has done recently. As soon as Frances Perkins produced some of her financial data, we examined it. Mr Moore gave an idea of what was being looked at, but clearly he has not had detailed discussions with those people. The Government has. The Government has had extensive discussions with them - with our finance experts, our accounting people, and all the rest. Certainly, the basis of those suggestions is a calculation based, for the record, on the cost of a child in a small school, compared with a marginal cost of the child in a larger school. For Mr Wood's benefit, the methodology is net present value analysis.

The real issue in this debate is to get constructive issues forward so the Government can know what decisions the

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community would like us to take. As I said before, there are social realities involved in setting priorities. We have to look at whether quarantining the education vote would ensure that the impact of our parlous financial situation fell in other social equity areas.

I want to read something into the record. It was written by a great economist, Fred Hirsch, in *Social Limits to Growth*, a marvellous book of the 1970s which is true today. I have had it since it was published. At page 117 of his text, he said this:

Social limits to growth, analysed in the preceding chapters are the problem - or problems - of success. The vast increase in material productivity has pushed the frontier of mass demand into terrain where there is no longer more for all. Once again, as in the pregrowth era, one man's gain is often another's loss; and both may lose from the struggle. This class of problem is at points exacerbated by the institutional mechanism of the market economy, as it has emerged under the drive of capitalist development as modified by a liberal-democratic state. But the essence of the problem has been seen to reside in a rather general influence, in the response by the economic mechanism or by political controllers to demands registered by individuals looking to their own immediate situation.

Surely that sums up this debate. The ALP and Mr Moore have chosen to get onto the band wagon on a sectional side of the debate in this society. Not once in their speeches - and I have no doubt that Mr Berry is clawing in his mind for words - did they mention the real social justice imperatives of this issue.

There is a solid debate going on in the Government. There is no split between the Rally and the Liberals on this issue. I want to put down that myth as well. Mr Humphries wrote to all the party leaders on 8 May, outlining the discussion paper the Government had approved for release and calling for comments within the ministry. That is really consultative. No little caucus rules here. We have been invited, Minister by Minister, to comment. I am happy to table that letter as an example of the effective, constructive debate. There are no splits. Those are just mythical devices that the Opposition is pushing up, hoping to get back into government. Are responses coming from Ministers? Certainly they are. I wrote on Monday to Mr Humphries, seeking his support for the ongoing success of the outside school hours care services in the ACT. (Extension of time granted)

It is all very well for the Opposition to pillory some of us at school meetings. It is tremendous to get a roll on for an unintelligible argument that Labor has had from day one - that we just continue as we are and sail the Territory into bankruptcy.

As I was saying, I wrote to Minister Humphries on Monday about the outside school hours care services. I wrote a strong letter. I am happy to table that letter as proof of the effective consultation going on in the Government. It is effective. There is no split; we are dealing our way through the matter. If imperatives result from this debate, I am sure that the Chief Minister and the rest of us will be the first to act on them. It is a consultation phase that Labor wants to kill and use as the ideological base for its own electoral gains. That is something that deserves comment, Mr Speaker.

It is now very clear that there are some people in this Assembly who do not care to serve the whole community; they are there to serve themselves, their political aims and their electoral gains. Certainly, Mr Speaker, you will see all the little shibboleths come out. I have not heard a word in Cabinet or in our joint party room about the green space zealot. What a myth that is!

The Labor Party closed five schools in 1988. So it started the roll on those issues. There has been vast and very hurtful hypocrisy in this debate. Those people in the media who have attended outside meetings on this matter have seen and heard all the spite and rancour there that Labor members put out here occasionally against us. They are reluctant to assist us to move the population onto a reasoned and constructive debate; they do not want that debate.

Mr Wood: Well, you certainly cannot do it on your own.

MR COLLAERY: You do not want that debate, Mr Wood. You do not want to hear it. I am particularly disappointed to hear Mr Wood adopting that approach because he is a school teacher. He has walked through classrooms and he knows the state of them in the ACT. I am not talking about the broom cupboards either, although some of the Labor members are taking - - -

Mr Kaine: They are hiding in them.

MR COLLAERY: Yes, hiding in them. Thank you. I nearly said something worse! There is a letter in today's paper about one school group that has effectively organised itself to look after the joint resources in a community context - that is, the neighbourhood school thing.

I do not know the exact figures, but Mr Humphries says that half of our enrollees are out of their catchment areas. Do you know what a leading community server, a great, but humble person in this town, said to me yesterday when I was giving out some cheques to some parlous community groups? She told me that in the United Kingdom and other countries school buses were not provided for out-of-area enrollees.

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I do not know whether that is a good idea or not, but that must be looked at. In Britain, the great socialist country of the 1960s and 1970s, the Government cancelled school buses completely and preserved the school system. What have you done, as an opposition, to assist us in that debate? Would you be prepared - as that courageous community worker said - to look at one of the greatest costs in the system, school bussing? Mr Humphries has said that half our students are out of catchment, and I dare say that when their parents are working a lot of them are taken to school by bus. Many of us have bussed our children around the area for years in this town.

Most certainly, Mr Speaker, in this debate we have seen a total failure to address the social imperatives of this issue - the setting of priorities within a shrinking economic situation in the Territory. We have seen a desire to use this debate for short-term political and electoral gain and to deflect the real community argument. Given the fact that on Sunday night I initiated a meeting between Frances Perkins, our Treasury people and Mr Humphries' group, I certainly believe that we have to go out there and assist the debate. You would not do that. Constructive things are now happening, and I think that Canberra people are too intelligent to be fooled by your stunts any longer. We will see a constructive resolution of this issue.

MR JENSEN (12.10): Mr Speaker, I rise briefly to speak in this debate as one who has had two children go through the ACT school system, from primary school right through to college. I have also been involved in parents and citizens associations, both as a member and at executive level, and on school boards. I was also a representative of a college during the last round of school closures in the ACT.

During that time, the previous Federal Minister who was responsible for this area sought to divide the community. Divide and rule - that was his option, that was the aim of the proposals that were put forward. I stood up at P and C council meetings and implored the groups to get together as they doing now. I support what is happening with the groups - getting together and talking about the issues, talking about the requirements and the needs for the education system.

I said to them at that time, "For goodness' sake, get together, get your arguments together, and do not fight each other, because that is what they want you to do". Those were the sorts of issues that were raised at the time, and I am pleased to see, at least in this case, that there has been some change in the process by which this issue is debated in the community.

Mr Speaker, today I wish to refer to a couple of issues about possible closures and subsequent sale of schools from a planning perspective. I refer in particular to some statements made on ABC radio by Mr Langmore, the member for Fraser. From my point of view they were disappointing

statements because I would have thought that someone with Mr Langmore's ACT background would have known a bit more about the leasehold system. I can only wonder why Mr Langmore was making statements about the fact that developers would be reaping wide and long profits from the sale of schools.

Mr Berry: Mr Humphries said they would.

MR JENSEN: Mr Berry, if you will listen, I will explain to you the situation in exactly the same way as I explained it in reply to Mr Langmore yesterday. Mr Langmore said that developers would be making large sums of money out of the betterment tax from the sale of schools. But developers do not own the schools in the ACT. The schools in the ACT are owned by the Canberra community. It is not the developers who are seeking to change the lease purpose clause. If necessary, it will be the ACT Government that changes the lease purpose clause. There is no betterment in those circumstances, because those leases will be sold on the open market, not as schools, but for the purpose for which the lease has been changed.

Mr Berry: We understand, Norm. They call it selling off the farm.

MR JENSEN: Well, it is a pity that Mr Langmore did not mention that in his comments yesterday.

Mr Humphries: That was deliberate.

MR JENSEN: My colleague Mr Humphries has suggested that it was deliberate. That is the sort of scaremongering that those opposite have been indulging in and unfortunately Mr Langmore seems to have fallen into that trap as well.

Mr Speaker, the proceeds of sale of such sites also allows for the reserve price to be set on the basis of the new purpose. It could be housing. It could even be for the sorts of activities that are currently operating in some of the schools that have been closed. For example, Sports House is in an old school.

Earlier Ms Follett mentioned the Downer community centre. The new facility that has been provided there was opened by the previous Minister for Education. I have had discussions with the Downer community and I suggest that, rather than the Downer area being downgraded, if you like, as a result of its school closing, it has been revitalised because the community got together and encouraged the development of the area as a community centre. It did not need the school to do that. The community did it, and I pay some considerable credit to the people of the Downer Community Association, with whom I know Ms Follett is acquainted, for their activities in that area. That is good and I am glad to see it.

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It is also possible that some of the schools that may be closed will be available for community welfare facilities. Rather than having to go to the expense of building new community facilities and welfare facilities, which my colleague Mr Collaery has already indicated are required by the community, it may be possible for those community facilities to be provided in some of these schools, if and when they are closed.

The other comment I wish to make relates to the fact that, if we close these schools, we would sell them all off at once. How ridiculous! Mr Humphries has never suggested that, as of next year, in 1991, all the schools are going to close at once. That has not been the case at all, Mr Speaker. The proposal has been that those schools, if they are closed, will be closed over a period of time. They will not be closed all at once. Therefore, Mr Speaker, there will be no flooding of the market for spaces for community facilities. There will be no flooding of the market with spaces for medium-density housing. It will be a controlled development.

Mr Collaery has already told us in another situation that there are people out there crying out for aged persons units, because of the increasing age of our community. It is not inappropriate for some of these sites to be used for that purpose. The people of Canberra will benefit from the sale of parts of those sites to enable those facilities to be built for the community - - -

Ms Follett: I thought you said you were not selling them.

MR JENSEN: Ms Follett is aware that we had discussions about the proposals for the development of housing commission homes in the Downer area. I seem to recall that we had a meeting on site in relation to that issue. It is important that those facilities be provided, but not necessarily on the site being proposed. We are looking at that issue again, as Ms Follett is well aware.

I put it to you, Mr Speaker, that from a leasing and land point of view, some of the comments that have been made have been an attempt, once again, to mislead the Canberra community. We see this quite regularly from the people opposite.

MR WOOD (12.17), in reply: Mr Speaker, the remarks of people opposite do not convince me that they understand the educational implications. In fact, Mr Jensen has just said it all. They have a very carefully thought out plan to sell off these sites. A long way down the track they have got it all planned.

Mr Kaine: That is rubbish, Bill. You are usually much more open-minded than that.

MR WOOD: I will quote you Mr Jensen's words, which I wrote down. He said, "We will not flood the market". It seems

to me that it has been carefully thought out. He is the Minister for planning.

Mr Jensen: No, I am not.

Mr Kaine: He is not a Minister for anything.

MR WOOD: All right; Executive Deputy. I must apologise for that. It is clear that this whole exercise makes sense. I suppose it is viable economically only when school sites are sold off.

Mr Jensen: What about the community facilities? You did not mention them.

MR WOOD: Well, you do not seem to have an interest in those community facilities. You do not want the scouts to go into the schools. You want them to walk two, three or four kilometres to a school that has not been closed at the time they usually use the facility, which is between 5.00 pm and 8.00 pm or thereafter. That seems to be what you want to do with them.

Mr Humphries, what the Opposition requires from you is this: first, we want an accurate statement of the money savings, if any, that will come from school closures. We want that for individual schools and for the whole system. That is not a difficult task, and we require you to do that. Secondly, we would like a clear statement of the budget requirement that you have to meet. I can understand that with this Government, as opposed to the Follett Government, your Treasurer might be a little reluctant to do that.

Mr Kaine: We will tell you in September when the budget is brought down.

MR WOOD: But if you will not give us that - and I expected your response - at least give us an indication that you have been told a figure or that you know a figure, because there has been no indication in the debate that you have even been given a figure to work to.

Your vague and alarmist statements are no substitute for effective management. We want you to be able to demonstrate that you know where you are going with your closures. Let me give an example of Mr Humphries' or this Government's approach - and I think this is pretty typical. Mr Humphries said that money would be available from the sales of schools; capital would be available to refurbish other schools where children were relocated. I think that is a fair assessment. That is cannibalism. That is what they do in Third World countries. That is what they do where their resources are so run down that they have to knock something down to put it somewhere else. You are destroying facilities to sustain other facilities, and that is a nonsense.

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It is clear that Government members do not understand what schools are about, and I think that is a great shame. Ms Maher spoke about the planning that brought us to this situation. There is no denying that we are in this situation because of planning - which we have mostly supported in our system - over a great number of years. But it is a planning structure that imposes a great deal in a community; it is a carefully detailed planning structure - - -

Mr Humphries: And we cannot afford it any more.

MR WOOD: Well, you cannot demonstrate that. You refuse to put figures on that. You cannot prove that. Do not say it if you are not prepared to prove it.

I suggest that Ms Maher read a comment by one of the former NCDC planners in this week's Chronicle, because it does point to the planning argument, a fact we acknowledge. But more recent planners have caught up with this and have planned schools with a smaller core. We have schools now in Tuggeranong planned for 360 students. But given that number, the Government will have to close them all. That is a nonsense, is it not?

I particularly want to talk about Mr Collaery, who said that we were quarantining education. No, we do not want to do that; we have not set out to do that. What we would do and what we require you to do is to establish a priority.

Mr Collaery: Why don't you say that at public meetings?

MR WOOD: You have not heard me. You have not been at the public meetings I have been at, have you? That is what you need to do, Mr Collaery.

I particularly want to refer to the rubbish, the nonsense remarks that Mr Collaery made about disadvantage. He worked himself into some sort of frenzy about that. I wish that Mr Collaery would talk to Mr Humphries about that because that is exactly one of the things we are trying to say to him, and he just cannot hear us. We are trying to say to him that if you close schools you will cause disadvantage. These are the factors that he ought to be considering, apart from those purely economic ones.

Mr Collaery: He is.

MR WOOD: Well, he has never said it.

Mr Kaine: He is.

MR WOOD: He is? But you told me - - -

Mr Collaery: Do you want to see the letters?

MR WOOD: Yes, please. Table them. So you are having to shove down his throat the fact that there are factors other

than educational. In the past he has declined to acknowledge that. Mr Collaery, are you telling Mr Humphries that, if schools are closed, families will need two incomes or two cars in order to get children to the more distant schools? Are you going to provide the buses and pay their bus fares? Or is that additional cost to parents - bus fares and change of school uniform - going to be a charge on your welfare budget as disadvantaged families come forward?

Mr Collaery: I am glad you recognise it.

MR WOOD: Well, I hope Mr Humphries recognises it because these are factors that have to be considered. By closing schools, Mr Collaery, you can increase the level of disadvantage. We have a system of preschools, which by and large we like to locate next to or near to primary schools so that parents can walk with their children during the day.

Mr Collaery: Did you congratulate the PRB for the recommendation on preschools?

MR WOOD: Well, the board had a couple of options there. I hope you do not go down all those paths. What are you going to do about disadvantage for those scout groups that have to go some considerable further distance in order - - -

Mr Humphries: You are exaggerating.

MR WOOD: But you cannot spell it out for me. Do not keep interjecting; you cannot spell out a thing. Some scout groups will have to travel two, three, four or five kilometres further in the dark, especially at this time of the year, in order to continue their activities.

What about disadvantage in Mr Jensen's territory, down there in Tuggeranong? Are you going to disadvantage parents there by not providing a preschool in some suburbs? That is part of disadvantage. These are the aspects of disadvantage, Mr Collaery, that you ought to be considering.

There is a whole range of other criteria that Mr Humphries ought to be reviewing. I have mentioned just some of them in this place before. We have raised this other one of disadvantage today, but there is a whole host of them that he has been most reluctant to take any account of.

Mr Kaine: Like the basic Labor one: no school can be touched. Is that a good criterion?

MR WOOD: That is a very good criterion. Mr Collaery said that there was no split in the Alliance Government over this matter.

Mr Collaery: There certainly is not.

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MR WOOD: Well, I can accept that. I have seen you standing up here today and you have all been joining in together. I accept that. Clearly the split is between the members of the Residents Rally in this Assembly and such members as remain in that party outside this Assembly. That is where the split is because those people at least have an understanding of education and a realisation of what should be happening in this Territory. One of the things that should be happening is that no school should close.

MR HUMPHRIES: I wish to make a personal explanation, Mr Speaker.

MR SPEAKER: Do you claim to have been misrepresented?

MR HUMPHRIES: Yes, Mr Speaker. In the course of her remarks, Ms Follett said that there had been no consultation on the part of the Government with the school community - - -

Ms Follett: No real consultation.

MR HUMPHRIES: Well, I will describe the consultation that has occurred, Mr Speaker, and see whether that constitutes, in her words, "real consultation".

Mr Berry: I raise a point of order, Mr Speaker. Mr Humphries is debating the issue. The debate has concluded.

MR SPEAKER: Thank you for your observation. You are incorrect there, Mr Berry. Please proceed, Mr Humphries.

MR HUMPHRIES: Mr Speaker, I want to indicate that there was real consultation with the school community before the criteria were even launched. I wrote to organisations such as the Canberra Pre-school Society, the ACT Teachers Federation and the Council of Parents and Citizens Associations of the ACT asking for suggestions on ways in which the Government might tackle budget problems, including the education budget.

Mr Berry: He is debating the issue, Mr Speaker. He has not been misrepresented.

MR HUMPHRIES: I am answering a point raised inaccurately by Ms Follett in the course of debate.

MR SPEAKER: Order! Mr Berry, please desist. Mr Humphries, please get to the point.

MR HUMPHRIES: Mr Speaker, the misrepresentation was that there was no consultation. I want to table the following letters:

Budget priorities for education in the ACT - Copies of letters to Mr Humphries, Minister for Health, Education and the Arts, from -

Mr T. Cobbold, Secretary, ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Associations Incorporated, dated 23 March 1990;
Ms R. Richards, President, ACT Teachers Federation, dated 20 March 1990;
Ms J. Scott, Canberra Pre-School Society Incorporated, dated 20 March 1990.

Question put:

The Assembly voted -

AYES, 7

Mr Berry
Mr Connolly
Ms Follett
Mrs Grassby
Mr Moore
Mr Stevenson
Mr Wood

NOES, 9

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

Question so resolved in the negative.

WANT OF CONFIDENCE IN CHIEF MINISTER Notice of Motion

The Clerk: Notice has been received from Mr Stevenson that, on the first sitting day following 7 June 1990, he will move:

That this Assembly has no confidence in the Chief Minister of the ACT in view of his lack of integrity, lack of credibility and extreme hypocrisy as demonstrated by his intention to have the Alliance "Government" introduce a Bill to tax X-rated videos, in absolute contradiction of his statements in this house on 21 November 1989 in total condemnation of such a tax.

Sitting suspended from 12.32 to 2.30 pm

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

School Consolidations

MS FOLLETT: My question is directed to the Treasurer. I wonder whether he could inform the Assembly how the Priorities Review Board reached its figure of \$5.3m in recurrent savings on the closure of 21 schools, which it has expressed at table 6.1 of its report.

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MR KAINE: No, I cannot answer that question. The Priorities Review Board did its work. It took advice from consultants and it put that report to me last Friday. I have not analysed every inch, or every centimetre - whatever the measurement is these days - of every page, so I cannot answer the question offhand. However, I am sure that the calculations are in the board's report or the consultant's report somewhere. If Ms Follett cannot analyse it, I will get the information and provide it at a later date.

Preschools

MR STEVENSON: My question is addressed to the Minister for Health, Education and the Arts. Has he or his department considered saving money in the school system by adopting a suggestion, put to me by a constituent, that preschools be combined with primary schools that have low numbers, so that preschool areas could be developed for, say, town houses?

MR HUMPHRIES: It probably is not appropriate that I comment on that possibility in detail. That is a suggestion which I have heard before, and it does emerge from the report of the Priorities Review Board which was released yesterday. It is an idea to which I believe some people have addressed their minds and to which I believe the Government will have to address its mind. I cannot comment on whether it will be a feasible idea. I acknowledge some strengths and some problems with the suggestion. However, as with most of the suggestions being put forward by the board, the Government will be examining those proposals and identifying whether it is feasible to pursue those ideas in order to save money in education and other budgets.

Independent Living Centre

MR BERRY: My question is directed to the Minister for Health, Education and the Arts because he is well known for his involvement in the closure of schools and the inability to answer questions in relation to costs. Was the space occupied by the Independent Living Centre at Macquarie school included in the 13,000 so-called vacant places in ACT government schools?

MR HUMPHRIES: I cannot answer that question without taking it on notice because the review of the number of places in the government system was not conducted since I have been Minister or since the ACT has had self-government. It was conducted by the Federal Labor Government between 1987 and 1988. I cannot, therefore, answer that question. However, I am very happy to supply Mr Berry with any information that he requires on that school.

MR BERRY: I have a supplementary question that the Minister might like to take on notice also. While he is getting this information, he might also find out how much it would cost in rent terms to relocate the Independent Living Centre or for it to pay rent at the market rate at the school.

MR HUMPHRIES: I am happy to obtain the information that Mr Berry wants, on the proviso that this does not become an exercise in closure by stealth - by identifying particular parts of the system and particular savings that would be made by particular actions, and then going out and frightening the concerned school community with those figures.

Mr Collaery: They would. They have been doing it for three weeks.

MR HUMPHRIES: I think that they may well have less than noble motives.

MR SPEAKER: Order, Mr Moore!

Mr Moore: Mr Speaker, I draw your attention to the fact that I have not said a word.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Moore, your maniacal laughter is voluble.

MR BERRY: Mr Speaker, he seemed to be calling for some sort of undertaking from me in relation to that question. If I may, I will give an undertaking to the Minister that any information that he provides will be used to expose him in relation to school closures.

MR HUMPHRIES: I have to say, Mr Speaker, that if that kind of advance costing is to be used in a fashion which will be unnecessarily frightening and deleterious to the interests of education in the ACT he will have to ask very hard to get the information that he seeks.

Mr Moore: I was standing to raise a point of order, Mr Speaker. I would ask you to withdraw the word "maniacal" that you used in reference to me, Mr Speaker.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Moore, I must admit that that is not a correct term to use in your case. There are other terms that I could have used.

Mr Moore: On a point of order, Mr Speaker; can I request an unqualified withdrawal?

MR SPEAKER: I withdraw it. Thank you, Mr Moore.

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Priorities Review Board

MR JENSEN: Mr Speaker, my question is directed to the Chief Minister. It has been suggested that some concerns with regard to the PRB report have been raised amongst some members of the Government Service staff. Can the Chief Minister provide some information on his intention which may allay those concerns?

MR KAINE: It is a fairly broad question, Mr Speaker.

Mr Wood: You wrote the question, did you not?

MR KAINE: No, I did not, Mr Speaker. So the inference is again unworthy of Mr Wood. But, expecting questions of all kinds about the Priorities Review Board, I have a great deal of information here, and if I get any question on the matter which is really relevant I will sensibly go to my notes to make sure that I can give a proper and full answer. I think that, Mr Wood, is what you would expect a Minister to do.

Mr Wood: I have no argument about that.

MR KAINE: I think your inference that somehow I wrote the question is unworthy of you.

Mr Moore: I raise a point of order, Mr Speaker, on relevance.

MR SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr Moore.

MR KAINE: But it was a very broad question as to what assurances I can give the members of the ACT Government Service about the implementation of the recommendations of the Priorities Review Board. Mr Speaker, I think it is significant that one of the first decisions that the Government has taken in relation to the Priorities Review Board is to maintain and strengthen the current links between the ACT Government Service and the Commonwealth Public Service. In other words, we do not intend to break away and establish our own public service. I think it would be unproductive to do that. So, to that extent, members of the ACT Government Service will continue to enjoy the same conditions of service and the same interchangeability between our public service and that of the Commonwealth as they have enjoyed in the past. There will be no change in their status in that respect.

I think that reflects the Government's view that the current arrangements have been beneficial both to the ACT - that is, the ACT Government and the community - and to the staff involved. I think this Government at least recognises and appreciates the exceptional efforts which Government Service staff have made in the lead-up to, and since, self-government. In that time managers and staff have had to cope with a great deal of change. They have done so very well. They have adjusted to it. They

continue to deliver services at a very high standard to the community. This Government would not want to disturb that.

The Government is committed, Mr Speaker, to ensuring that the ACT continues to have a public service of excellence. That is one of the two major thrusts of the Priorities Review Board report. I sought it, in the first place, so that we could improve on the public service that we have now, to make sure that it is a public service of excellence, that the people in it are professionals, that they are motivated and that they understand the relationship between government and the community - -

Mr Berry: Mr Speaker, on a point of order; one would appreciate it if the answers were kept as brief as possible. We had the ministerial statement yesterday.

MR SPEAKER: Thank you for your observation. Chief Minister, please save ministerial statements - - -

MR KAINE: I think I have answered the question fairly well, Mr Speaker. We will not be disturbing the present arrangements and the relationship between our public service and that of the Commonwealth, but we will be doing everything in our power to make that public service a better one, so that we can be proud of its excellence in terms of its professionalism, its motivation and the quality of the services that it delivers.

Alcohol and Drugs

MR MOORE: My question is directed to the Minister for Health, Education and the Arts. I understand that the health authority has appointed an alcohol and drug service review steering committee which comprises three alcohol and drug service workers and one policy and planning employee. Would the Minister please inform the Assembly why only government employees have been selected for that committee of review.

MR HUMPHRIES: Mr Speaker, there is no such thing as an ACT health authority any more; we are talking about the Department of Health. In terms of the review of which Mr Moore speaks, I have to say that I have no information about it. I suspect that what he is referring to is some sort of internal review conducted by the department. I have certainly not appointed any review panel or board in this area. I will happily supply Mr Moore with information about whatever review it is that he is referring to.

Preschools

MR CONNOLLY: Mr Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister for Health, Education and the Arts. I refer him

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to the preschool task force that was established by the former Government. When will the preschool task force report be presented to him? How much money is he aiming to save from the preschool recurrent budget? When would any restructuring of the preschool sector begin?

MR HUMPHRIES: I thank Mr Connolly for his question. Yesterday in the basement I was asked when the task force will be reporting, and I indicated at that stage that I believe it will be at the end of next month. I may be wrong in that. I will certainly check and give Mr Connolly further advice if that is not the correct reporting date. I expect it to be reporting by about the end of next month.

As to when savings might be made, that is entirely dependent on what recommendations the committee makes, as he will probably be aware. In the previous Government his predecessor as a member of the Assembly appointed the task force to identify ways of making savings in the preschool area, specifically to examine the question of closing a number of preschools. I will have to examine that report before I indicate what course of action the Government will take from it. Naturally, also, that means that it will be impossible for me to indicate to what extent the Government would want to make savings in the area of preschools. Obviously, we would have to be satisfied that savings could be made in that area without threatening the quality of preschool education.

Priorities Review Board

MR WOOD: Mr Speaker, I direct a question to the Minister for Health, Education and the Arts. On what basis did the Priorities Review Board make the claim that "the school community has indicated that it would prefer decisions to be made and implemented without undue delay"?

MR HUMPHRIES: Mr Speaker, this is like the question directed to the Chief Minister on the subject of the Priorities Review Board. I do not have an insight into the workings of the minds of those who sat on the board. I have to say that I tend to agree with their assessment that there is certainly a strong desire on the part of many in the education community - indeed, many representing them such as the people in the ACT Teachers Federation, the P and C councils and so on - that there be a swift resolution following the period of uncertainty that they are currently facing. I have no desire to see that uncertainty lengthened at all, if I can possibly avoid it.

I think we have to take that comment at face value. That is an assessment by people, some of whom are members of the Canberra community. I will certainly do my best to see whether that is the genuine view of the community and, if it is, to ensure that it occurs.

MR WOOD: I have a supplementary question, Mr Speaker. I certainly would have expected the Minister, before and after the tabling of that report - and there probably have been some few days in that - to have informed himself of the significant areas in it. Can he undertake to provide that information as soon as possible, unless Mr Kaine has it there on his desk in his prepared answers?

MR HUMPHRIES: Mr Speaker, I have certainly taken the last few days to examine very carefully what is in the Priorities Review Board report. It did not extend, in my understanding, to an examination of what the members happened to be thinking when they made particular statements.

Mr Wood: It is not a matter of thinking. They should have some evidence for what they say.

MR HUMPHRIES: I do not want to debate the PRB with Mr Wood, Mr Speaker, but it is quite clear to me that the statements that it made in that respect reflect a very obvious concern of many in the community.

Wood Burning Stoves

MR STEFANIAK: My question is addressed to the Minister for Finance and Urban Services. Is the Government going to ban wood burning stoves as a result of some allegations in relation to their contribution to the greenhouse effect?

MR DUBY: I thank Mr Stefaniak for the questions. Firstly, I would like to assure the Assembly that the Government does not have, and has never had, any intention of banning wood burning stoves or open fires. Mr Stefaniak will remember that on 26 April this year, as part of the Government's response in relation to the greenhouse effect, I released a discussion paper outlining some of the initiatives being proposed for the ACT to deal with greenhouse climate change. One aim of that strategy is to reduce emissions of gases that are detrimental to the environment. The most effective way is to reduce our reliance on energy derived from fossil fuel.

Wood burning stoves are a good alternative home-heating source. However, Canberra does have a smoke problem in the cold evenings and nights which is caused solely by wood burning stoves. In order to make wood burning stoves more attractive in the built-up area, the Government will consider introducing regulations to control emissions from solid fuel burning stoves.

The Legislative Assembly standing committee is investigating an integrated energy and environment policy for the ACT, and I understand that it will be reporting shortly. The Government will certainly take into account any of its recommendations. We believe that the community

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will respond positively to initiatives designed to reduce pollution and make wood burning appliances more efficient.

School Buses

MRS GRASSBY: My question is directed to the Minister for Health, Education and the Arts. Has he had any discussions with the Minister for transport, Mr Duby, on the provision of extra buses to cope with the increased demand due to school closures? How many extra buses will be required, and what will be the cost?

MR HUMPHRIES: I do not know how many times I have to state to the Opposition, before it sinks in, that questions of that kind cannot be answered until we identify which schools are to be closed. I have to make the point again and again, obviously, that it is entirely appropriate in the circumstances that the Government identify the sorts of criteria that it should be using in order to make savings in the area of school consolidation before it starts to name the schools concerned.

Mrs Grassby: It could end up costing twice as much.

MR HUMPHRIES: Mrs Grassby's view seems to be somewhat inconsistent. Her colleagues seem to be saying that we should be extending the period of any change over a number of years, not allowing anything to happen this year which might affect schools. On the other hand, she wants to know now which schools are to close. I cannot provide that information, Mrs Grassby. I have no intention of providing it.

Mrs Grassby: No. I would like you to have done a survey on what buses you would have to use.

MR HUMPHRIES: I cannot provide the information about buses until we know which schools are going to close. I can, however, assure you that, as soon as the Government has identified which schools will close, it will move immediately to identify the costs of bussing and other incidental costs associated with those arrangements, and I will inform the house at the earliest opportunity.

Inspection Fees

MR STEVENSON: My question is addressed to the Minister for Finance and Urban Services. Are Canberrans to be subjected to inspection fees if they complain about or report possible offences relating to dogs, noise pollution or other areas within his portfolio?

MR DUBY: Thank you, Mr Stevenson, for the question. The question of inspection fees in the areas that you mentioned in particular, which were dogs - - -

Mr Stevenson: Noise pollution or other areas within your portfolio.

MR DUBY: Naturally, Mr Speaker, it goes without saying that, if someone makes a genuine complaint that a particular person or agency is somehow contravening the law - whatever that law may be, whether it relates to dog control, noise pollution or anything else - and requests that an inspector come and presumably see whether the law is being complied with, it would not be contemplated that any fee would be charged to the complainant.

Community Facilities

MS FOLLETT: My question again is directed to the Minister for Health, Education and the Arts. We have established that he has not talked to the Minister for transport. Would he inform the Assembly whether he has had discussions with Mr Collaery regarding the cost of new community facilities which would be needed to replace the spaces that will be no longer available after 15 to 25 schools have been closed.

MR HUMPHRIES: It is perfectly plain, Mr Speaker, that members of the Opposition are preparing the ground for a major assault on the people of Canberra on the basis of scare tactics. They are going to claim that the Government is not planning properly for the process of change, that it is doing this in a half-baked way. Again, as I said with respect to Mrs Grassby's question, it is attempting to make assumptions about changes which we simply cannot project until such time as those changes have actually been identified and mapped out.

Naturally, we will be speaking to Mr Collaery and others within the Government about the way in which particular communities might be affected by the way in which schools in their areas are closed or otherwise affected by these changes. But to do so now, when I have no particular schools to identify as being closed, would be a waste of the valuable resources of the Ministers and the bureaucracies that serve them.

Priorities Review Board

MRS NOLAN: Mr Speaker, my question is addressed to the Chief Minister. Would he outline the Government's view on the Priorities Review Board recommendations in relation to betterment tax.

MR KAINE: Yes, Mr Speaker. I thought I made it pretty clear in my tabling speech yesterday, when I presented the Priorities Review Board report, that the Government had

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made a decision about betterment tax some time ago, and that was in anticipation of the introduction of the new planning law, when it is approved by this Assembly. It has not yet been approved but, in anticipation of that law being passed by the Assembly, the betterment tax was made effective from a specific date, and that was to prevent people avoiding that tax. Notwithstanding the recommendation of the Priorities Review Board, Mr Speaker, the Government sees no reason to change that decision that has already been made or to move away from the system of purpose clauses for leases to a zoning system, as I think it also suggested.

As I also pointed out yesterday, the Government will refer all the recommendations made by the Priorities Review Board in relation to planning and land administration to the consultative process that we have already established to consider proposed planning and land administration legislation. That process is already in place. The recommendations of the Priorities Review Board will simply be referred to that process so that when we get a conclusion it will have taken into account all of the available views, including those of people who are currently commenting on the Government's earlier proposals on this matter.

Small Business

MR BERRY: My question is directed to the Minister with the wind up, Mr Humphries. I know he is concerned about being exposed in relation to a lot of these matters, but this is an important question for small business in the ACT.

Mr Jensen: Stop waffling and get on with it.

MR BERRY: When you are a Minister, Norm, you will be able to respond. Has the Government done anything to study the impact on small businesses located near school sites which might close?

MR HUMPHRIES: I thank the member full of wind for his question. The answer is the simple one that I have given already twice before today. I do not think it bears repeating. I think the rest of us have got the message pretty well, finally; obviously Mr Berry and his colleagues have not. Engaging in a study of particular communities that might be affected by particular actions obviously - - -

Mr Berry: Gary, have you done anything generally?

MR HUMPHRIES: Mr Speaker, Mr Berry is well aware of the sorts of impacts that the closure of five schools had on the community at the end of 1988. He is not an idiot. I assume he has some idea of what sort of impact those sorts of things have. Obviously it is a matter that the

Government will have to weigh up carefully in the course of deciding which schools will close. It is ridiculous to suggest that those sorts of things will not be taken into account, but taking them into account now is obviously not appropriate. Doing it now would obviously mean alarming some communities that their particular facilities will be affected whereas they may not when the final decision is made.

MR BERRY: Mr Speaker, I wish to ask a supplementary question. When can the community of Canberra expect that the Government might express an interest in the effect that school closures will have on small businesses?

MR HUMPHRIES: The Government has an enormous interest in the effect on the community of things of this kind. It is intent on ensuring that small business, in particular, in the ACT continues to prosper and grow. We will be ensuring that everything that we can possibly do will be done in that regard. Before Mr Berry goes touting his affection for small business, he ought to think of some of the things that his Government did while it was in office that hurt small business.

Ms Follett: Like what?

MR HUMPHRIES: Like increases in payroll tax, Ms Follett.

Ms Follett: They don't pay it.

MR HUMPHRIES: Some small businesses do pay payroll tax, you will have to realise.

Ms Follett: They are not small, in that case.

MR HUMPHRIES: There is the logic of Ms Follett: if they have 10 employees, they are not small. That is the sort of stupid thing that I think we have come to expect from the Opposition. Mr Berry will see that we will be treating the process of change very carefully, with due consideration given to the community. Nothing that he or his colleagues have said today in any way affects or tarnishes the Government's intention in that regard.

Schools Administration

MR MOORE: My question also is addressed to the Minister for Health, Education and the Arts. Can he tell us whether his Executive Deputy, Dr Kinloch, acquainted him with information given to Dr Kinloch in April this year which made it very clear how millions of dollars worth of cuts could be made to the Education Department through a reappraisal of the administrative pyramid, without closing any schools whatsoever? If the Minister is familiar with this information, can he tell us whether he intends implementing it, or has he been convinced by his

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administrative hierarchy that they are indispensable whilst the education and welfare of our students are not? If the Minister was not made aware of this document about which I am talking, must we presume that Dr Kinloch has failed in his executive responsibilities yet again?

MR HUMPHRIES: Mr Speaker, I do not know to what document Mr Moore is referring. It is possible that some documents that have come before the Government or me personally or Dr Kinloch personally have been discussed between me and Dr Kinloch. I really cannot recall. I discuss a great deal of what happens in education with Dr Kinloch. We discuss documents all the time. If the document to which Mr Moore is referring comes from outside the ACT Government Service, it is conceivable that it was referred to appropriate areas of the Department of Education for further consideration. It may be the case in those circumstances that I have not yet seen it.

However, if he would care to describe to me, after question time, what that document looks like, I am very happy to go back and examine my records to see what exposure I have had to it. It is quite evident, Mr Speaker, that the Government has a very strong intention to discuss the implications of these sorts of changes with the community. If there are ways - and I have certainly been to public meetings at which this view has been expressed - of trimming the size of the education bureaucracy without affecting the quality of our system, I will naturally be looking at those sorts of options. I made that clear at a number of meetings.

But I think the point has to be borne in mind that the ACT has an excellent education system; it has long had a very good education system; and it has had that system not just because of some ethereal factor that floats around the ACT and magically settles on schools. It has happened for a number of reasons, including the quality of the advice and the support given to successive Ministers responsible for schools in the ACT by the Education Department and its predecessors.

I will not accept the view shamefully touted by Mr Moore in this place that we can willy-nilly run about the Territory cutting back the number of public servants serving the Government - sacking public servants - merely because, in his view, they are redundant or do not adequately serve the Government. That is a shameful suggestion. It is without foundation in the vast majority of cases. This Government will be considering the levels of manning within the ACT public service, assessing critically and carefully what is and is not essential to the maintenance of a high-quality education system, and acting accordingly.

School Buildings

MR JENSEN: My question also is directed to the Minister for Health, Education and the Arts. I refer to comments made by Mr Moore with respect to the problems of large schools - in particular, the spectre of the Canadian-style high schools. Maybe it will be along the lines, Mr Speaker, of his comments about our having only five of each school in the ACT. Will the Minister install the multilane corridors that Mr Moore considers necessary for large schools?

MR HUMPHRIES: I thank Mr Jensen for his question. It is pretty obvious that, in this particular area, once again Mr Moore has got hold of a slender fact and has let his very fertile imagination go to work on it and turn it into all sorts of bizarre and wonderful things. Mr Moore seems to assume that we will need multilane school corridors because we will be building new schools. What Mr Moore does not appreciate is that we already have a very high standard of school infrastructure in the ACT; that we need to fully, properly and economically use that infrastructure; and that it will not, therefore, be necessary to build new schools or engage in massive modifications to schools.

The schools of which I am speaking were designed to hold, in the first place, considerably more students than they hold at present. If when they were built they did not require multilane corridors, why, I ask Mr Moore, is it necessary for them now to be installed?

Mr Moore: Go out to Ginninderra High School and see.

MR HUMPHRIES: I went out to Ginninderra High School, as it happens, at lunchtime today, Mr Moore. I was very impressed. I looked around the building, and it appears to me - - -

Mr Moore: Were you in a stairwell when the bell rang?

MR HUMPHRIES: Yes, I was. I was there at the change of classes.

MR SPEAKER: Order! Mr Humphries, please address the original question.

MR HUMPHRIES: Yes, Mr Speaker. I think it is very obvious that Mr Moore has a great deal of confusion in his mind about the implications of these changes. The ACT really has very few schools which were designed to be small. Almost all of our schools were designed for considerably large numbers of students - between 400 and 600 - but at present the average school enrolment is around 300 students, and in many cases considerably less than that.

You could argue, Mr Speaker, that we do not have any small schools; we have only large school buildings, with few students in them in some cases. With the cost of running

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large schools with small enrolments it is very inefficient, and the costs are of little benefit to students. We are determined, as I think I have made quite clear before, to ensure that the capital costs of the system do not drain the education budget. We will not allow bricks and mortar to draw resources away from services of more direct educational benefit.

MR KAINE: I request that any further questions be placed on the notice paper.

Water Pollution

MR KAINE: Mr Speaker, I would like to answer a question without notice which was asked by the Leader of the Opposition on 26 April. The question was: what action will Mr Kaine, as Minister for the environment, be taking to ensure that the situation with the resourcing of the Environment Protection Section is rectified? The supplementary question was: will Mr Kaine undertake to investigate with the Environment Protection Section their statement of under-resourcing of their section, as expressed in the Canberra Chronicle article of 24 April?

Mr Speaker, I undertook to investigate the article which appeared in the Canberra Chronicle of 24 April 1990. Having read the article, I am now aware that Ms Follett has completely misquoted it, and I find that the article is quite correct in what it says. The relevant paragraphs show that a new policy is being developed to address the problem of pollution arising from the home building phase. The article states:

But the EPS would need more manpower to carry out any such policy which, according to EPS manager, Hugh Crawley, might not be a possibility because of the government's other budget commitments.

This statement recognises the realities of government, that there are many proposals competing for funding under the government budget and that a responsible government must carefully assess the implications of all such proposals. A policy to control building sites is being developed, in consultation with industry groups, to ensure a streamlined system which imposes minimum constraints on the industry and which is not going to create an unnecessary drain on government finances. Mr Speaker, I table the answer to that question.

PAPERS

MR COLLAERY (Attorney-General): Mr Speaker, pursuant to section 11 of the Taxation (Administration) Act 1987, I table, for the information of members, the 1988-89 annual report of the Commissioner for ACT Revenue Collections.

Pursuant to section 13A of the ACT Building Ordinance 1972, I table the 1988-89 annual report of the Building Review Committee.

Pursuant to section 93(1) of the Audit Act 1989, I table the 1988-89 annual report of the Australian Capital Territory Gaming and Liquor Authority.

I also table, for the information of members, the 1988-89 annual report of the Australian Capital Territory Radiation Council.

**DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENTS AND INQUIRIES REGULATIONS AND
REVISED ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENTS AND INQUIRIES BILL
Ministerial Statement and Papers**

MR KAINE (Chief Minister), by leave: It gives me pleasure to table today the draft Environmental Assessments and Inquiries Regulations 1990, the revised Environmental Assessments and Inquiries Bill 1990 and an explanatory statement concerning the regulations and the revised Bill. Mr Speaker, on Tuesday, 20 March, I tabled the draft Environmental Assessments and Inquiries Bill. At that time I informed the Assembly that the regulations were being drafted and would be released for public comment as soon as they were available.

The tabling of these regulations and the revised Bill today marks the next stage in this process. It demonstrates the high priority that we place on making this important legislation available to Assembly members and the public for comment as soon as it is drafted. In tabling the draft Environmental Assessments and Inquiries Bill, I stated that the Bill represents an essential factor in ensuring that a balance between economic growth, community expectations and environmental concerns is achieved and maintained.

As an integral part of the proposed land planning system, the procedures set in place by the revised Bill are directed towards the overall aim of the system: to provide the people of the ACT with an attractive, safe and efficient environment in which to live, work and have their recreation.

Mr Speaker, the Environmental Assessments and Inquiries Regulations establish the process whereby the actions and requirements of the Bill can be translated into environmental assessments. The draft regulations include: provision for the mandatory conduct of a preliminary assessment of a proposal where required by the Territory plan; details of matters to be contained in a preliminary assessment; and details of the contents of public environment reports and environmental impact statements.

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I now turn to a brief explanation of the way the regulations will operate. The draft regulations provide that the Territory plan should prescribe the circumstances in which preliminary assessments will be mandatory. The advantage of this approach is that it will allow the specific requirements of a physical location to determine whether special needs exist for an environmental assessment.

In addition, the revised Bill provides that preliminary assessments be made publicly available. This will further enhance the overall transparency of the planning system by making sure that the community has access to information regarding significant proposals and their environmental effects.

Preliminary assessments will broadly include the kind of information required by a notice of intent under the equivalent Commonwealth legislation. To that extent, the regulations follow a pattern that is well developed and is familiar both to government and the community, including the private sector.

In terms of environmental impact statements and public environment reports, the matters to be included in them draw upon experience gained from both Commonwealth and New South Wales legislation. A feature of the regulations is that a description of the methodology employed in the study and the names and details of the persons engaged in the preparation of the report or statement will be required to facilitate a considered analysis of the overall quality of the document and its conclusions.

In this context, it should be noted that the regulations provide for the contents of environmental impact statements and public environment reports to be identical, with the difference being the extent of public consultation required under the Bill in the preparation of each.

Also, it should be noted that the regulations provide that the Minister may direct that a report or statement be subject to peer review of the adequacy of the methodology employed in the preparation of the report or statement. This is an important and innovative safeguard.

Finally, members should note that the revisions that have been made to the Bill are generally minor and are intended both to complement the draft regulations and to improve the overall structure and ease of interpretation of the Bill. I commend the draft regulations and revised Bill to you and welcome any comments that you may have on them. I present the following papers:

Draft Environmental Assessments and Inquiries Regulations and revised Environmental Assessments and Inquiries Bill 1990 - Ministerial statement, 30 May 1990, together with an explanatory statement, draft Environmental Assessments and

Inquiries Regulations and a draft Environmental Assessments and Inquiries Bill 1990.

I move:

That the Assembly takes note of the papers.

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

TREASURER'S ADVANCE
Ministerial Statement and Paper

MR KAINE (Chief Minister), by leave: Mr Speaker, I table a statement in relation to an increase in the Treasurer's advance. Under section 47 of the Audit Act, the Chief Minister is required to lay before the Assembly a statement setting out the facts upon which the Executive was satisfied that there were additional funds available this year in excess of the moneys required for appropriations. The statement shows that the Treasurer's advance has been increased by an amount of \$3.467m and also identifies the purposes for which the additional appropriation is proposed to be charged. I present the following paper:

Audit Act - Statement in accordance with subsection 47(4), together with a letter from Mr B. Gatley, Acting Assistant Under Treasurer, to the Chief Minister, dated 3 May 1990.

I move:

That the Assembly takes note of the paper.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

INTERNATIONAL NURSES DAY
Ministerial Statement and Paper

MR HUMPHRIES (Minister for Health, Education and the Arts), by leave: Mr Speaker, 12 May 1990 was designated as International Nurses Day. I would like to take this opportunity to speak about developments within nursing services of the Department of Health. The International Council of Nurses, in association with the Florence Nightingale International Foundation, declared 12 May as the most appropriate for nursing. The date is Florence Nightingale's birthday. The council, in close liaison with the World Health Organisation, promotes this date around the world, wherever a nursing organisation exists.

Several goals were originally established for International Nurses Day. However, in 1990 the theme presented was "Nurses and the Environment". This theme is at the

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forefront of current social and political issues locally, nationally and internationally. Nurses are undertaking the responsibility, like other areas of the community, to do more, and teach more, about our environment. Nurses are encouraged to raise greater awareness among members, colleagues and the public at large of environmental concerns and their detrimental effects on the health of the population.

The ACT chapter of the Royal College of Nursing, Australia, sponsored a nurses breakfast, held on Friday, 11 May this year, which I was very pleased to attend. More than 100 nurses from all areas of the private and public sectors of the health and armed services attended. The theme for the ACT centred around "Nursing - Our Diverse Roles". The representation of a range of ACT nurses at this function was a reminder of the diversity of nursing within the ACT community.

There are a number of issues which currently affect the nursing profession in the ACT. These include the nursing career structure review for both community and hospital nurses, including Calvary Hospital. The early review was initiated by this Government, and an independent panel is due to report to me by 31 May this year. I understand submissions have been forwarded to the panel from a broad spectrum of interested parties, including my department and the relevant unions. I have also had the chance to discuss with the review panel the issues that are being raised as part of this process.

Structural efficiency agreement issues, such as roster trials at both Royal Canberra Hospital and Woden Valley Hospital, will be of great interest to all nursing staff. Shortages of nurses continue to be experienced in some specialist areas - for example, operating theatres. Shortages in specialist areas are not unique to the ACT. Hospitals management has met with the Commonwealth Department of Education, Employment and Training to explore the potential for providing short courses. The courses would be specifically aimed at attracting specialist nurses back into the work force.

Mr Speaker, in conclusion, I would like to mention that nurses, who comprise a large section of the health care work force in the ACT, are a most valued resource in the delivery of health care to the ACT community and surrounding regions. I present the following paper:

International Nurses Day - ministerial statement, 30 May 1990.

I move:

That the Assembly takes note of the paper.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

SUPPLY BILL 1990-91

Debate resumed from 3 May 1990, on motion by **Mr Duby**:

That this Bill be agreed to in principle.

MS FOLLETT (Leader of the Opposition) (3.14): As Mr Duby pointed out when he introduced this Bill, it is purely an administrative piece of legislation which is designed to continue the funding of the ACT Government until the budget is passed. So it provides for some five months of such funding and, as is usual, there is no provision for new policy.

Mr Speaker, I wonder whether it is even necessary for this Government to produce a supply Bill, as it seems to me and to many other people that the real budget was handed down yesterday afternoon by the Government's property developer mates, in the form of the PRB report. It seems also that that is a budget strategy that is designed to destroy the provision of services in Canberra. I think we can expect future supply Bills under the Alliance Government to look totally different from the one that we have before us today. There will merely be a one-line appropriation, made out to "the ACT Department of Contract Management".

Mr Speaker, all the talk that we have heard of efficiency gains from contracting out and the Priorities Review Board has simply failed to take into account the most comprehensive study of contracting out that has ever been undertaken in Australia. That report, which I believe is called Breach of Contract, was recently released by the Evatt research centre. There is a very good reason why the PRB did not take it into account, and that is because it does not accord with the PRB's proposed sell-off of Canberra. That report found that contracting out, particularly of municipal services, is not the great success that it is made out to be. In many instances, it has been found to cost more, not less. It has also been found to involve more non-pecuniary interests.

Mr Kaine: On a point of order, Mr Speaker; I thought the subject for debate today was the Supply Bill, not the Priorities Review Board report, or the budget. The Supply Bill deals with only five months' worth of money.

MR SPEAKER: Your objection is overruled. Please proceed, Ms Follett.

MS FOLLETT: As I was saying, Mr Speaker, the report to which I referred found that contracting out, particularly of municipal services, is not the great success that it is often made out to be. As I have said, it has been found to cost more, and that does not even include the non-pecuniary costs of things like a reduced quality of service and reduced accountability.

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Mr Humphries: It's a gross generalisation.

MS FOLLETT: That is a reputable report, Mr Humphries. It does not suit your agenda and it does not suit the agenda of your Government. It is nevertheless a reputable and well researched report which has looked at over 400 municipal governments to draw its conclusions.

Mr Speaker, the proposals that the Government has recently put before the ACT will absolutely devastate the ACT's economy. They will reduce jobs - Mr Kaine has made that quite clear - and they will also reduce public services. They are an attack on the wages and the working conditions of the people of Canberra. The ACT economy, I believe, is on the brink of recession, and the current Government's policies are all that is needed to push it over the brink.

Most disturbing at the current time, Mr Speaker, is the Government's attack on the ACT public education system. I will say it again, as I have said it on every occasion that I have had a chance to debate this issue: the Labor Party supports the neighbourhood school system. We believe that system best meets the educational needs of Canberra's children, and we believe that it has many other important social and economic effects as well.

We believe that continued funding for the neighbourhood school system should reflect the Canberra community's priority, which it has clearly expressed, for education. As we now know, the Liberal Government's proposals, with the full support of the Residents Rally, for school closures are not justified on budget grounds and are a reflection of the Liberal ideological outlook. School closures, we now know, are simply not necessary. They have not been justified in any of the debate that has taken place on that issue.

There are a great many reasons, which appear to have escaped the Government totally, why neighbourhood schools are important. From the point of view of the children's education, the issues range from the safety of children walking to and from school to questions of equity for school children from different backgrounds. It is quite clear that the neighbourhood school operates at a much more human level. Neighbourhood schools are able to cater for the needs of children in a particular area. Schools that I have visited, such as the Griffith school which has a particular enrolment of Aboriginal children and children from a non-English speaking background, cater to the particular needs of children in their area. These neighbourhood schools are able to offer programs targeted to meet those students' needs.

The closure of neighbourhood schools will also have a grave impact on the opportunities available to children for equal education regardless of their background. The experience elsewhere shows that, if the system of local catchments and

local preference ends, schools will compete with each other to attract students. It is quite clear that a snowball effect will develop, so that schools which are perceived as the best will attract the children whose families are most able to afford transport costs and pay extra for school activities. With Mr Kaine's recent hikes in bus fares, including those for children, it is quite obvious that the families that can afford to pay additional transport costs are diminishing, not increasing.

Pretty soon you will find the development of an unequal education system in which some children will have better opportunities within the government system than others. It is precisely because we have such a good public school system that we have to fight to ensure that all children, regardless of background, have equal access to that system.

The impact of school closures on the community goes well beyond educational opportunities. I have spoken before of the closure of the primary school in my suburb and the devastating effect that that has had on community life. Earlier today, Mr Jensen tried to rationalise his Government's approach to that and to say that the community groups have picked up where the primary school left off, in terms of community activities in Downer. I would refer Mr Jensen to the Priorities Review Board's pronouncements on the subject of the use of the now closed Downer Primary School. I think he will see quite clearly that its agenda for what it describes as a piece of prime real estate is to sell it off. So all the pious pronouncements about school closures having no impact on community life are undone by the Priorities Review Board's approach to the matter.

There is no doubt either that parents who used to shop on their way to or from school are now going elsewhere, to larger shopping centres, and that has had an impact on all local businesses in that area. Where a school closes, the range of shopping and other facilities is likely to be severely restricted, simply because they have fewer clients. The restriction of services available within a neighbourhood is a major problem for the elderly, disabled people and any family that does not have two cars. So there is a snowball effect - when you close a school all services in that neighbourhood are reduced.

I said at the outset that school closures cannot be justified on budget grounds and have a lot more to do with the Liberals' philosophical outlook. Mr Speaker, quite simply, I believe Mr Kaine and Mr Humphries have been misleading the ACT community in their story that we will lose \$100m of Commonwealth funding at the end of the next financial year. That has never been the Commonwealth's position. The Commonwealth guaranteed to maintain ACT funding on the same real terms for a three-year period, as the Prime Minister has written to Mr Kaine. It runs out at the end of the next financial year. But what the Commonwealth has promised, and what Mr Kaine has failed to draw attention to, is that there will be at least a further two years of transitional funding arrangements.

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Mr Kaine: Like they honoured their obligation to give you the money last year. That is what will happen.

MS FOLLETT: The Commonwealth has clearly acknowledged that there must be a transition, not the catastrophe which Mr Kaine is threatening. There is no particular reason why we should focus on the \$100m figure which, I say publicly, was plucked out of the air by Senator Walsh. It is well known that Senator Walsh is no friend of Canberra. That has always been my position.

Mr Jensen: We will agree with that.

MS FOLLETT: I am glad you heard it. Maybe you will believe it. Mr Speaker, I think that we should be quite clear that the closure of schools in Canberra is part of an overall Liberal agenda of dismantling public services and transferring expenditure from the Government to individuals in our community.

If some school closures do save the Government money - a question which is certainly far from clear and which has certainly been far from clarified by the Minister responsible - they will certainly result in a greater expense for parents and others in the community. So what the Government might save - and that is very questionable - is simply picked up by individuals. The same can be said of other false economies made by this Government, such as the closure of the Ainslie Transfer Station and the Royal Canberra Hospital. Again, it is forcing people to spend, out of their own pockets, money which it then classifies as some sort of government savings. That is a nonsense.

The whole exercise is about forcing individuals to pay for things, instead of the Government providing them on an equal basis to everybody in the community. That is what governments are about - the provision of services. I believe that we have now a recipe for an unequal community, in which the wealthiest can pay for the best in the range of services that is available to them and the rest of the community will simply miss out because they cannot afford those services.

Mr Speaker, I think that the current track that the Government is going down, particularly in regard to public education and public health, is a very retrograde step for the ACT. It sets out to destroy some of the things that are the best in the ACT; it sets out to turn from public enterprise to private enterprise the services that should be the business of government; and it is a purely ideological attempt by this Liberal Government, with the full compliance, it now appears, of the Residents Rally, to privatise the whole of the ACT.

I think the most surprising thing about the entire debate is the position of members of the Residents Rally. We now know that they are just Liberals. They have not stood up

for any of the policies with which they went to the people, including education and the Royal Canberra Hospital in particular. I know there are still people in the community - one or two only, admittedly - who really think that the Residents Rally will somehow moderate this Government's view on the provision of community services. I think, after the education debate this morning, all of their illusions are shattered because what we have here is a purely Liberal government in the mould of Thatcher and Greiner, only somewhat more so.

MR HUMPHRIES (Minister for Health, Education and the Arts) (3.28): Mr Speaker, it is unfortunate that the grassfires are still being started by our friends opposite. I do not see any prospect of them giving up in that regard. But I will do my best once more to indicate to the people of the ACT, who I am sure are listening to this ongoing debate, what the real facts are and how the ACT might begin to challenge the financial problems that it currently faces.

I do not really think that Ms Follett, who has now left the chamber, has a lot of credibility on the score of her projections about money. I recall her, during the last election campaign, with great certainty and assuredness, telling the community that there was no need to panic about money, that the ACT had enough guarantees into the future to ensure that we would not have to go without, that everything was all right and not to worry. I recall the day, almost 12 months ago today, when Ms Follett attended her first Premiers Conference at Parliament House. I recall the two pictures on the front page of the Canberra Times - the first one showing Ms Follett entering the Premiers Conference, smiling, happy to be there representing the ACT for the first time, and the second picture of her when she was told, in spite of the Commonwealth guarantee, about how the ACT was going to be docked \$21m. I recall the slack jaw and the stunned look on her face, as she suddenly realised that her friends in the ALP Federal Government were not as friendly as she had first thought.

Mr Speaker, ever since those photographs appeared in the Canberra Times I have very much doubted whether Ms Follett's projections about the Commonwealth Government's intentions in the ACT really have much credibility. It is quite obvious to everybody, except perhaps Ms Follett, that the ACT will not have any favours done for it by the Commonwealth Government. It is appropriate in those circumstances that we take proper, considered, careful measures to ensure that we are prepared for what will undoubtedly be a very steep slide down a hill towards lesser levels of Commonwealth funding for the ACT. We are in that sense like the third little pig that built his house of brick. The others laughed at him, but in the long run he was certainly more secure than his brothers.

I think it is also worth making a passing reference to the sorts of ridiculous statements that Ms Follett has made

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about non-government services and the way in which the Government is proceeding. Particularly, it is worth drawing to the attention of the Assembly how much Ms Follett's views are out of tune with those of the rest of the community. Ms Follett claims that we, on this side of the chamber, are isolated, locked up and not in touch with what people are saying. Mr Moore also, I know, claims frequently to speak for the community, saying "the community believes this" and "the community believes that". I have been to a number of public meetings now, talking about school closures, and I have posed the question: what should the Government be doing to find money to avoid having to cut more deeply into education? On almost every occasion - I am sure Mr Moore will bear this out - the answer has been, "We should be looking at the size of the ACT bureaucracy". They constantly point to particularly the number of people in the Department of Education but generally the number of people in the ACT public service.

Mr Moore: As one of the solutions they expect you to be competent to work out your priorities.

MR HUMPHRIES: Mr Moore will be well aware of views of the public on this matter and how strongly people feel that we should be cutting back on unnecessary bureaucracy before we start to cut back on services. What Mr Moore and Ms Follett do not seem to realise in their attacks on processes such as the Priorities Review Board is that issues of the kind that those people in the community are talking about are addressed in those documents. They address the way in which the Government is tackling issues of overmanning and overstaffing and ways in which it might provide services better to the community of Canberra. In my view, that is what the Priorities Review Board has been all about - delivering better services at less cost to the ACT taxpayer. (Quorum formed)

I know that Mr Berry must find some of these comments very painful, and he must be embarrassed and humiliated by having these home truths rammed forcefully to his attention, but I hope that he will endure the embarrassment in the absence of his colleagues.

Mr Speaker, before the interruption I was talking about the way in which the public service is perceived by many in the ACT community to be the first port of call of any government that wishes to reduce the cost of providing services to the ACT. It is obviously the perception of many people in the community - not one shared by the Opposition - that governments are able, in those cases, to trim the cost of providing government services without necessarily reducing the services themselves.

That is what measures of the kind we have spoken about in the last two days are all about, yet that is not what the Opposition seems to understand, because it is possible to reduce the cost of government without necessarily reducing the services made available by that Government. That is
a

point that, apparently, is entirely lost on those opposite. They seem to believe that it is possible for governments to spend endlessly, that necessarily more money produces better services, and things go on in that fashion. We know, from the bitter experience of past years, particularly in the Federal sphere, that it does not follow, that it is possible to reduce the cost of services without necessarily reducing the services themselves.

Ms Follett has been assiduous in her refusal to countenance methods of reducing the size of the ACT public sector - and I am referring here to the ACT's public service rather than the Commonwealth one - even though it is quite apparent that the ratio of citizens to ACT public servants is very high. It should be possible, on the experience of other States and Territories, to deliver the same quality of service without the same employment burden, if you like, on the ACT taxpayer. That is extremely obvious. It is also obvious, with respect, to some members of Ms Follett's Opposition. Mr Wood, I recall, was at the Aranda Primary School the other night and was pressed on this point.

Mrs Grassby: So was I.

MR HUMPHRIES: I think you were late, Mrs Grassby.

Mrs Grassby: I was there for at least an hour. I had been to three other meetings before.

MR HUMPHRIES: Mrs Grassby, you may be able to confirm hearing Mr Wood say when you were there - notwithstanding what Ms Follett said before - that if the ACT Labor Government had stayed in office any longer it would have been turning its attention to the number of public servants being employed to see whether all of them were necessary. Those are the words that Mr Wood used, but it appears to be what Ms Follett is attacking on the part of this Government. I wonder what the difference of views exposed there really means. I think it indicates that there is an obvious perception on the part of people with commonsense - and I put Mr Wood in that category - - -

Mr Wood: We don't threaten genocide.

MR HUMPHRIES: I see, so I am guilty of genocide? I understand. It is pretty clear that sensible people can see that any sensible government has to explore the question of reducing costs without necessarily reducing the number of people and the cost of delivering those services.

I think the comments that Ms Follett has made in respect of schools have been rebutted fairly conclusively by this morning's comments. I want to make one more reference to her confidence in the Federal Government to go easy on the ACT. She keeps repeating the fact that the ACT has two more years of transitional funding and is confident in those circumstances that somehow we will survive quite well on present levels of spending for the next two years.

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Obviously, what Ms Follett is telling us is that somehow, at the end of those two years of transitional funding, the ACT will magically find enough money to maintain services at the present levels. Ms Follett appears not to be willing to make any allowance for that whenever it comes up, and I say that deliberately because I do not believe she has conceded a single point in respect of the Government's program of reducing costs in the ACT. She has not conceded that a single thing we have done is in the right vein, is positively directed towards reducing the costs of providing services in the ACT. There has been not one concession on her part. As Mr Jensen clearly indicates, others in the debate have indicated that; others are more willing to be realistic and are prepared to acknowledge that there is a very strong case for making reductions in the delivery of services in the ACT.

It is true that in many cases those individuals acknowledge the general aim but are reluctant to consider the particular aim in the case of services directly affecting them. That is the responsibility that is thrust on government and one which we cannot afford to ignore. We will, therefore, examine questions of funding reductions, funding savings, in every area of government. We will not be excluding any particular area. As I have indicated already, education will be, and is, one of those areas.

I think we have to examine just what sort of support we can expect from our colleagues on the other side of the lake. I mentioned, I think, in a debate yesterday that we have had considerably contradictory remarks on the part of many members of the Federal Labor Party. I quoted, I think, Senator McMullan's remarks concerning the need for us to adjust our sights, to encourage different expectations on the part of the community. We also heard, I think today, his view that there ought not to be any increases in taxes and charges to the ACT. Senator McMullan, unfortunately, does not provide an easy answer as to what the ACT must do, nor, for that matter, do the people opposite. I have not heard a single constructive suggestion about how the ACT is supposed to find its way out of this morass.

I fully expect, in the coming days, to hear Ms Follett criticising the Government for its tax and charge increases that were announced yesterday by the Chief Minister, even though she has, over the last few weeks, at the meetings that I have attended, constantly called on the Government to increase its revenue catch as a way of meeting the particular problems that we are now facing. I do not think Ms Follett has any solution to the problems that are before the ACT, and she is secretly very glad that it is not her Government that is now facing those problems.

A press statement, dated 22 May, from the ACT Teachers Federation is evidence of the very obvious belief by others in the Territory that there is the need for the ACT to take matters into its own hands. It stated:

After all, the ACT education system was designed and resourced by the Commonwealth Government for many years. Dealing with a reduced budget within this infrastructure is impossible without harming the quality of education already established.

The federation clearly put the view - and it put it to Mrs Kelly probably on the same day or thereabouts - that it should be the Commonwealth which is making some effort to contribute to the problems with which the ACT presently finds itself. (Extension of time granted)

Mr Deputy Speaker, I think that the message is pretty clear so far: the ACT needs to take stock; it needs to be decisive; it needs to become master of its own destiny. That means taking a very considered but decisive view on what it must do about money. I am greatly warmed by the acceptance by many in the community of the need for the Government to take action in this area. There has been ample evidence in the meetings that I have attended, and from the people to whom I have spoken, of a need for the Government to take action. People are not content with a "sit back, do nothing, and pray that it will be all right" attitude of the kind that was taken by the previous Labor Government. That is what we are doing, and I think it will pay dividends in the not too distant future.

MR BERRY (3.44): I must say that the Labor Opposition is most concerned about the management team that will be responsible for the administration of this Supply Bill until the need for it expires, so to speak. In the first place, Mr Deputy Speaker, the Treasurer, who is our Chief Minister, will have the responsibility for making decisions in relation to the funds mentioned therein. This is the Treasurer who, when the first Follett budget came before this house, could not understand the proceedings. This is the Treasurer who had to be helped, by way of a 15-minute adjournment, so that he could be held by the hand and shown how the process worked. This is the Treasurer who does not understand the processes of government in relation to budgets. He is the Treasurer who will be responsible for the administration of this Bill. This is also the Treasurer who criticised the Follett budget this morning on ABC radio in relation to the payment of wages for members of this Assembly. He is prepared to tell untruths to the community by saying that the Follett budget was in some way responsible for the decision handed down by the Remuneration Tribunal.

I am concerned that the management of this Bill will be in the hands of this Treasurer. I am also concerned that we have opposite a government tainted with dishonesty, hypocrisy and reprehensible behaviour, and they are the people who will be responsible for managing this Bill. We have opposite a Chief Minister of low moral fibre, who was not able to pull his Ministers into line. Mr DUBY escaped.

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Mr Collaery: On a point of order; this is an imputation on the Chief Minister, who is accused of having low moral fibre. If he had said "morale", he might have got away with it.

Mr Moore: Yes, that is standing order 55, for imputation.

Mr Collaery: I am indebted to the voice at the pillar. I ask that Mr Berry be instructed, firstly, to resume his seat, Mr Deputy Speaker.

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: Yes. Mr Berry, would you sit down while the point of order is being raised.

Mr Collaery: And withdraw the imputation on the Chief Minister.

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: And you say the imputation is "moral"?

Mr Collaery: "Low moral fibre".

MR BERRY: The Chief Minister stands accused of having low moral fibre. But it is up to him; he can respond to it if he wants.

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: Yes, I would ask you to withdraw that, Mr Berry.

MR BERRY: I withdraw anything that is on the record in relation to low moral fibre and I will say that, in my view and in the Labor Opposition's view, the Chief Minister is of low moral fibre.

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: Are you withdrawing that or not, Mr Berry?

MR BERRY: I withdrew the first bit. I have just added another bit. That is my view.

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: I think I have asked you to withdraw "low moral fibre".

MR BERRY: I am allowed to have a view on these things. It is my view; it is the Labor Opposition's view.

Mr Collaery: Withdraw it.

MR BERRY: I will not, not for you. It is an opinion that the Labor Opposition holds, and we are entitled to hold it.

Mr Collaery: Mr Deputy Speaker, you have instructed Mr Berry to withdraw, in an unqualified sense, his gross imputation on the Chief Minister.

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: I think "low moral fibre" is an imputation, Mr Berry. I would ask that you withdraw those three words, thank you.

MR BERRY: I cannot withdraw my opinion.

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: Just withdraw those three words and then get on with it, Mr Berry.

MR BERRY: The Deputy Chief Minister seems to be a bit jittery about the issue of low moral fibre, and I can understand why he would be. I withdraw any imputation, but I hold that opinion, and so does the Labor Opposition.

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you. Would you just get on with it now, Mr Berry, having made your withdrawal.

MR BERRY: As Mr Humphries nervously said earlier, talking about bushfires, I know that he is quite worried about his credibility in the community because it has fallen to a low ebb. He has provided us with lots of fuel to start those grassfires because he has disgraced not only himself but also everybody else in the Alliance Government as a result of his management of education and health in this Territory.

In relation to health, Mr Humphries has set out to impose the Liberal philosophy on public hospital services in the ACT. He has announced the closure of the Royal Canberra Hospital, but in more recent times he has announced the establishment of a 150-bed private hospital on the north side of the lake. Associated with that will be a reduction in public hospital beds in the ACT so that viability will be available for the private sector.

Mr Duby: It is a complete misrepresentation.

MR BERRY: Nobody would go into a private hospital bed when there is a good public hospital bed available, Mr Duby.

Mr Duby: There will be no reduction in public beds.

MR BERRY: There will be a reduction. He has also announced the give-away of 25 obstetric beds to the private sector. This is consistent with Mr Stefaniak's attack on women's areas in the Follett budget, as I recall, which was short lived because Mr Stefaniak was not able to direct it appropriately. Notwithstanding his considerable military training, Mr Stefaniak was not able to do that.

Mr Humphries did not know whether he wanted to attack education or health, and eventually decided to attack health in those days. But he has continued with it now. The aim is to force people into more private insurance in order that their fears about beds not being available to them will be allayed, and they will be able to cover themselves by private insurance.

This means that more people in the community will spend more of their scant disposable incomes on private insurance so that they can have access to the private beds to which Mr Humphries' policies will force them to be directed. He

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has announced the costings of his plans for the destruction of the public hospital system, which were known to be incorrect. So he has misled not only this Assembly but also the people of Canberra over and over again.

Mr Humphries: Mr Deputy Speaker, I raise a point of order in relation to standing order 55. I ask Mr Berry to withdraw the suggestion that I have misled the Assembly.

Mr Moore: You'd be able to substantiate that.

MR BERRY: I will substantiate it.

Mr Humphries: I want a withdrawal.

MR BERRY: No. I will substantiate it; do not worry about that.

Mr Humphries: You move an appropriate motion, not in the course of some other debate. It is a serious matter.

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: Sit down, Mr Berry. Yes, Mr Humphries?

Mr Humphries: Mr Deputy Speaker, to allege that a member, particularly a Minister, has misled the Assembly is an extremely serious matter.

Mr Collaery: It ought to be censured.

Mr Humphries: It is a matter for censure, as Mr Collaery points out. I ask Mr Berry to withdraw the allegation. It is unparliamentary.

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: Yes, Mr Berry, what do you say about that?

MR BERRY: Mr Deputy Speaker, there was no objection from the members opposite when I made it very clear that they were tainted with dishonesty, hypocrisy and reprehensible behaviour.

Mr Humphries: Because we're used to it. Withdraw, Wayne.

Mr DUBY: Mr Deputy Speaker, get him to withdraw.

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: Just a second, Mr DUBY, I will handle this. You have indicated that this member has misled the Assembly. That is a very serious allegation, and perhaps that should be put in terms of a motion. There is provision for that.

MR BERRY: I withdraw that, Mr Speaker.

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr Berry.

MR BERRY: The Minister placed before this Assembly and the people of Canberra misleading figures. He deliberately did so.

Mr Kaine: On a point of order, Mr Speaker; that is a restatement of the original assertion.

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: I would ask you to withdraw. That is saying exactly the same thing, Mr Berry, as "misled the Assembly".

MR BERRY: He did not mistakenly do so, Mr Deputy Speaker. Mr Humphries quite deliberately placed those figures before this Assembly and the people of Canberra. That is not an imputation. That is a matter of fact.

Mr Collaery: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker; this member is persistently and wilfully disregarding the authority of the Chair. I ask that you consider naming him if he persists with this conduct.

Mr Moore: Which standing order?

Mr Collaery: It is 202(e).

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: It is 202, Mr Collaery, and if he persists with that I will certainly consider naming him. He is not doing that, to my satisfaction at this stage. Mr Berry, if you are alleging that Mr Humphries deliberately placed figures that he knew to be misleading before the Assembly, that is a very serious allegation, and I would ask you to withdraw that.

MR BERRY: No, I did not say that. He deliberately placed misleading figures before the Assembly.

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: That implies, Mr Berry, I think, that if he deliberately placed misleading figures he knew them to be misleading. Is that what you are saying? If you are not saying that, I think you had better rephrase that.

MR BERRY: He must know they are misleading. They are misleading figures.

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: You may say that they are misleading, but if you are imputing that he knew they are misleading that is a serious allegation.

MR BERRY: I withdraw - - -

Mr Kaine: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker; he is continuing with his assertion. He is declining to withdraw, and I suggest that you deal with him accordingly.

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you, Chief Minister. I think you have just withdrawn your allegation, have you not, Mr Berry?

MR BERRY: I withdraw that, Mr Deputy Speaker. You can call me on this one if you like, chum. Mr Deputy Speaker, Mr Humphries placed misleading figures before this Assembly and the people of Canberra.

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Mr Collaery: On a point of order, Mr Speaker - - -

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: He has withdrawn the words "deliberately placed" - - -

Mr Collaery: He has to withdraw the context and import of his words, Mr Deputy Speaker. He is persisting in trying to get on the record so he can photocopy and send off to all his little Labor scrubbers all over town this conclusion now. That is what he wants to do. I ask that he withdraw it or be named.

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Mr Collaery, the member has withdrawn what I consider to be offensive words.

MR BERRY: Mr Speaker, it gets to the point at which one cannot be critical of these people opposite, otherwise he is seen to be a - - -

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: Just continue, Mr Berry. You have withdrawn the offensive words. Just continue with your speech.

MR BERRY: These figures were known to be incorrect, Mr Deputy Speaker, because they were incomplete. They did not completely cover the hollow promises that the Minister had made. Why did he do that, Mr Deputy Speaker? It was because he had to choose costings which were different from Labor's, otherwise he would have looked stupid - more stupid than he looks sometimes - and there had to be some sort of deception to accomplish that. Those uncostered promises were put before this place to keep the remnants of the Residents Rally happy enough to dump their mandate and cheat on those who elected them.

Mr Deputy Speaker, there will be plenty said about Mr Humphries' behaviour in relation to these matters, but what he did not do was cost the promises. If he had, the figures would have added up to roughly the same as it would cost to keep the Royal Canberra Hospital open, which is well known, in the figures that Mr Humphries used.

It is no good scurrying off and doctoring up the figures just to suit your own ends. The figures have been supplied by an expert in the field of health management, and they will stick. There has been a fraudulent distortion of these figures to keep the Residents Rally onside.

Mr Kaine: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker; he asserts that there has been a fraudulent distortion. That is an implication against the Minister, and I ask him to withdraw it.

MR BERRY: I did not say anything about the Minister.

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: I think you should withdraw the word "fraudulent", Mr Berry.

MR BERRY: Mr Deputy Speaker, this Government is responsible for a fraudulent distortion of these figures.

Mr Kaine: Mr Deputy Speaker, I insist that it be withdrawn unequivocally.

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: Yes. Mr Berry, I direct that you withdraw the word "fraudulent". That is a very serious allegation. Fraud is a crime.

MR BERRY: It is serious because it is a serious offence that they have committed. There has been a distortion of these figures - - -

Mr Duby: Mr Speaker, is he going to withdraw or not?

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: Mr Berry, I would ask that you withdraw the word "fraudulent".

MR BERRY: I withdraw the word "fraudulent". But there has been a deliberate distortion by this Government of those figures to keep the Residents Rally onside until their use-by date has - - -

Ms Maher: No, he hasn't.

MR BERRY: I have withdrawn it. You are all getting a bit toey over there. Mr Deputy Speaker, I think we have touched on some raw nerves in the course of this debate. It is very difficult to trust this Government. I seek a short extension of time.

Leave not granted.

MR MOORE (4.00): How terribly churlish of the Chief Minister not to grant an extension of time when this side of the house so graciously extended some time to Mr Humphries. A friend of mine said, "There was a time when we as a society valued our friends and used money". This Government is turning us around to value money and use our friends. It is a sad situation.

Debate on the Supply Bill is an excellent opportunity to talk about general money management and the inadequacy of this Government in terms of its money management. Let me start by saying that Mr Humphries drew attention to the fact that the Labor Opposition had not made a single concession to the Government in terms of its money management. I believe that is the case. It is not the case with me, as you will recall from my speech on the Chief Minister's budget strategy. I drew attention to a number of things in that strategy which I saw as particularly positive and which I supported.

Similarly, there are a number of things in the Priorities Review Board report that I also see as positive. Of course, in overall terms, it is so far over the top that it

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will gain no credibility at all from the people of Canberra. Nevertheless, it does draw attention to a few areas in which some of the recommendations can be implemented.

I think it is appropriate to say that the total inadequacy of this Government in money management is that it goes headlong into looking at just money and thinking that money is what we should value. That takes it all out of context. What we should value is our social goals - what we use money for. The difficulty with this Government is that it has not attempted to set up any kind of framework or any kinds of social goals. There is a reasonably easy framework and a reasonably easy way to set the structure in place, although it would require a difficult set of negotiations and openness with the community - the sorts of things in which once upon a time, a long time ago, the Residents Rally members used to be interested but that seems to have long gone out the window, with most of the other things that they once valued. I often ask myself: how can they sleep straight in bed? Then I think they probably cannot sleep at all. It is a shame that Dr Kinloch is not here to hear that statement, but I am sure he will be able to read it in Hansard. He is probably the one in whom I am most disappointed.

There is a possibility that you can go back and, as a starting point only, look at a 1985 NCDC document that set out eight categories in terms of needs assessment planning. They were set out by the NCDC as a social framework, to begin the discussion as to where you should go and how you should set your priorities before you start trying to distribute your money.

Those eight categories were - and these are not in any particular order - income security and employment; physical and mental health; basic material needs, such as housing, transport and the other urban services area; education; protection of the environment; safety of the people; family and personal well-being; and community organisation and development.

Mr Jensen: They are not priorities if they are not in order.

MR MOORE: Mr Jensen interjects: why are they not in priorities? That is the whole point I am trying to make.

Mr Jensen: I said they are not in priorities if they are not in order.

MR MOORE: That is exactly right. The whole point I am trying to make is that they are not yet in priorities. The first job of the Government is to set its priorities and its social goals, not to set economic priorities, because economic priorities should be subject to the social priorities, not the other way round. That is where you are confused; that is where you have it wrong - completely wrong - and that is the problem.

Having established a framework, it is then time to go to the community and say, "This is what we suggest might be the major areas. These may be major divisions. We want to set our priorities, talk to people within each of those areas and then get those groups together to try to set out where those priorities should be established". A major community consultation exercise is required by that sort of system. But at least under those circumstances you are starting to get the basis to manage the money so that it is subject to what the community wants, instead of telling the community what it is going to get because the money dictates it. That is what has been happening here, and that is why I am going to vote against this Supply Bill because I do not believe that this Government is capable of managing money.

Mr Humphries: Blocking supply?

MR MOORE: I do not believe you are going to manage the money. It is not difficult; I will just say no.

Mr Humphries: Who was that guy, Gough Whitlam? What did he say about blocking supply? I cannot recall what he said about it.

MR MOORE: You cannot recall what who said about it?

Mr Humphries: Gough Whitlam.

MR MOORE: Gough Whitlam is no friend of mine. That is the bit about which you seem to be sometimes mistaken, Mr Humphries. Of course, you would like to close me in with Labor. As I have said here, within a political sense I have no friends, and that is how I intend to remain. But I do have the opposite.

If we then move on to looking at what you are doing in education, I will take the opportunity to remind you that in your destruction of education this was not perceived as good money management by the community in general. I also attended those meetings that Mr Humphries attended. But the dissatisfaction of the community with Mr Humphries and his Government - not with him personally, but with his decisions and with his Government - was made clear at those meetings.

I should emphasise that there was not dissatisfaction with Mr Humphries personally. A large number of people have commented to me that, as far as they are concerned, by going to those meetings and presenting his point of view, he was "courageous". I think that is perhaps over the top. Nevertheless, the fact that he did go to those meetings and was prepared to answer questions, I think, is a great credit to him, and it is something that other members of his Government might learn to do when they are under pressure. It was a very different story when they were under pressure over the fact that Mr Doby should have resigned but did not.

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MR SPEAKER: Order! Relevance, Mr Moore.

MR MOORE: Mr Speaker, I am glad you drew my attention to this. This is the Supply Bill, and we can discuss it basically. We have a very broad option traditionally.

MR SPEAKER: Yes. I think that is a little too broad though, Mr Moore. Please proceed.

MR MOORE: Not at all, Mr Speaker. I do not intend to pursue it anyway, so I shall move on.

Ms Maher: How about withdrawing it?

MR MOORE: Withdraw it? Is that a point of order?

MR SPEAKER: Order! You were not asked to withdraw it. Please proceed, Mr Moore.

MR MOORE: I think we have a point of order, Mr Speaker.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Moore, please do not attempt to run the Assembly. Do you wish to continue your speech?

MR MOORE: I do, thanks.

MR SPEAKER: Please proceed.

MR MOORE: Then we get to the rest of the education figures. We still have not had a satisfactory answer about the fact that Minister Humphries was able to table a document in this Assembly - the annual report of the Australian Capital Territory Schools Authority, now the department, dated December 1989 - which says that there were no surplus spaces, but within three months we suddenly have an incredible amount of surplus space. The Minister is being snowed by his department in an attempt to protect itself. Like most of us, he has at some stage watched Yes, Minister, and he probably should apply some of the tactics.

Then I should move on to health, Mr Speaker. I could say once again that the general feeling in the community is very strong about the Royal Canberra Hospital. Yesterday a petition was tabled. About 40,000 people were prepared to sign it. There was a tremendous effort from members of the community to collect those signatures of people who are dissatisfied with the decision to close the Royal Canberra Hospital. They are also dissatisfied that within a very short time the Government announced that there is going to be a \$150m private hospital to take a range of beds. We have a big "K" conservative government over here that is really just trying to go - - -

Mr Humphries: Big "K" conservative?

MR MOORE: That is right. You should see it when you get three of those together; that is when you get really

conservative, and that is the direction in which you are heading. This Government is just trying to hand the money over to the private sector. We get a transfer of money through its policies from the ordinary people to those who are already well and truly endowed with money. This Priorities Review Board document is a masterful example, taken in its entirety, of attempting to do just that. It gives you the excuse and the basis to do it.

So, when it comes to supply and money management, this is the same Treasurer, the same Chief Minister, who in effect threw away \$20m. When Senator Walsh made an off-the-cuff ambit claim comment it was grasped by our supposed negotiator who said, "Hooray, yes, it's \$100m" when the Grants Commission, as he pointed out yesterday, had identified only \$80m. So clearly, on grasping a figure like that, the Chief Minister has in effect thrown away \$20m because of his lousy negotiating tactics.

Mr Kaine: That was four years ago, mate. Use your brain if you have one. Just add the CPI to it for four years.

MR MOORE: Mr Speaker, I refer to standing order 202(e). You have drawn this man to order. He was drawn to order on several occasions by - - -

MR SPEAKER: Please proceed, Mr Moore.

MR MOORE: Our Chief Minister and our Finance Minister are supposedly our negotiators. Mr DUBY probably is a much better negotiator than most of them. He has been able to hold his little power position there against all odds. When you look at the 3, 3, 4 numbers, the four Liberals have two members in their - - -

Mr DUBY: To double transport funding from ATAC, which no other State could do.

Mr Humphries: He's an asset. You'd better keep him.

MR MOORE: I said he was a good negotiator. That is not enough for the other things, but he is a good negotiator. His party has you, Mr Speaker, and him as a Minister - two major positions - with only three members. The Liberals managed to get two positions - they have four members - and there is the good old Residents Rally dragging behind.

Mr DUBY: The best part is that you missed out.

MR MOORE: Exactly. That is the best part; I could not agree with you more strongly, Mr DUBY. Let us get that on the record. I am so pleased that I have not lost my credibility by being part of that absolute joke of a government, that absolute farce of a government, as it is seen by the community. I am delighted not to be a part of it. I think that its money management skills, as I have carefully explained in terms of its setting its goals, are totally up the pole. It has no idea how to do it, and that will be seen by the community in due time.

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MR COLLAERY (Attorney-General) (4.14): I think we need to get back to the Supply Bill and look at some alternatives, Mr Speaker. What would this crowd opposite us achieve were they armed with this Supply Bill? I just wonder. Looking at them sometimes, I wonder where they get their inspiration. I know Mr Berry has to look down from a great height, and Mr Moore is caught in that fog that usually surrounds his intellectual processes. But I ask the Canberra people: would this crowd make a credible alternative? Where would they be moving from?

Recently, Mr Speaker, at a seminar at the University of Canberra, I heard their leader - and I include the limpet in this - say that Canberra should be sovietised, that we should form little communes and committees all over the place and, by this magical process that got going in Vladivostok a few years ago, you would get a sort of consumer community cooperative going and Canberra would run much more smoothly and consultatively.

This extraordinary trip into political science 1 by the Leader of the Opposition was a real eye-opener to me. Perish the thought that we nearly allowed Ms Follett to get her agenda going. Mr Berry, from the firemen's union, is a skilled dealer on the floor in tactics and games of that nature. We see it here today. We see those divisive types of tactics.

I would like to turn this discussion to what this crowd would do with supply. We have seen what their political masters on the hill have done with it. While the mortgage belt is suffering and the Salvation Army is giving out more and more food parcels every month, we have seen the Labor Prime Minister continue, through his Treasurer, an interest rate policy that few in this country can abide by. We have seen that Government give millions and millions and millions away to the airlines to adjust problems that they had. We saw millions given to Kodak to retain its factory in Victoria. Did we see a social balancing equation there? Was that budget driven? Was this not a pragmatic political decision by the ALP bunch who run our country from up on the hill? What did they do when that trial was aborted in Sydney recently? That went under the carpet. There was a little rap on the knuckles, and it all went away.

We have all this moral outrage in hypocrisy that we have been hearing in the last few days, and the terribly divisive tactics being employed by the party and its limpet around the town on the so-called school closure issue. As the Chief Minister said, a suggested criterion was issued for discussion, and the Labor Party, with Mr Moore, fell upon it with glee, because here was a chance to score some quick points.

But if we gave them supply today, what would they do? I am sure tonight they would get up there in that room in the biggest bunk you have ever imagined and they would not know

what to do. Imagine the pressures to which they would have to respond. This town heard the Chief Minister on a radio program this morning, and that was reassuring. There is no doubt in the world that the message that we and the Canberra people are receiving is that there is a balanced government in power at the moment. It does not have the extremes of ideology. It has no extremes of ideology.

You are seeing the Alliance Government working for the benefit of all citizens in this Territory. There is lots of good information coming in, but we will not accept all of it. You are not prepared to analyse it and be responsible. You have to take up question time making cheap shots at what I would say, when you consider all the Ministers in this country at the moment, is a very gallant, young Minister of the Crown. You have not let him alone for the last few weeks.

You have had your drongos over at school meetings, spiking the meetings with catcallers, disturbances, questioners and all the rest - typical Labor Party tactics. I have seen them at meetings. You sent one over on Sunday. We had a good, rational meeting at a school last Sunday, and along came one of your Labor people who had nothing to contribute, just to yell out and make accusations.

Mr Duby: They stack their own. Why would they not stack everyone else's?

MR COLLAERY: Of course. What are we faced with? Would it be Ms Follett back in power? I do not know. Who would be the deputy leader? Clearly they do not want to put their most competent operator anywhere. Mr Bill Wood has been given the room, but not the chair, and everyone knows that. What a way to treat your colleagues! What a divided bunch! Who is the grand moraliser of the Assembly? I must admit that I am warming to my colleague - I like his ties - but he was not elected. As an unelected member, not in his second term after he faced the people, he has chosen, in his first term, to go on about the morality of the chamber.

Why did you not choose one of yourselves? Why did you give it to the newest member and expose him to the very strong response which he got yesterday? It did not gladden my heart to see this young lawyer coming into the chamber and copping it all because you put him up front, knowing that he would get all the criticism. Here is a crowd that scuttles off. Let the Hansard show that whenever there is a good debate going we rarely see the Leader of the Opposition in the chamber. I would really like to put a stopwatch on it, to know when she is prepared to come down here and face this solid debate.

Mr Speaker, the Supply Bill for the ACT presents us with the opportunity of looking at the balance sheet for the Territory. What is the balance sheet today? It is that you are not prepared to allow rational debate on an issue that Mr Humphries opened for debate. He did no more than

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open it for debate and say that we had a parlous position, that schools, on the advice available to him, had empty places. He invited all comers to join the debate. You could not have the decency to join that debate in any fashion other than to destroy and discredit his attempt to open a debate. It is a non-consultative process.

In the days after it, we saw the Leader of the Opposition down here signing stacks of roneoed letters. I saw some of them: "Dear Community Friend, we are here to guard your interests. We are here to look after you against the dreadful Mr Humphries". This is the maturity of the response from a team that was given a chance for seven months and could not, in the Rally's eyes - nor in Mr Duby's eyes - carry the ball.

You have heard acknowledgment of Mr Duby's skills. I have watched him also in Cabinet and at meetings. He is very shrewd, very sharp, good with figures, and as good as any backbencher or any Minister I have met, and I have met many in Canberra. You have joined a nasty process in this town of denigrating him whenever you could. I think it ill-becomes some of the newer members of the Assembly, who should not carry any of the bitterness of the defeat last year to the Assembly.

I am sure the debate will be properly and productively assisted not by the Labor team in this Assembly but by reasonable people in the Labor Party and the union movement who will join those corporatised boards, as they have indicated already, and assist us to give the workers a say. With the corporatisation of the Mitchell laundry, how on earth could this party be objecting to having a better say in the running of a process that affects the workers' interests? No, they do not want to have it. It is not a privatisation regime. It is the corporatisation of a laundry. But, no, they have to go on air and say the "new right" is alive, the Rally has been subverted, and this nonsense.

It may take a few months to put down, but God help you all when the community wakes up to how bereft you are of any sense of working together in the Assembly for the good of the Territory. They will wake up, I have no doubt, because ironically - and I am pleased to pass this remark over the empty front bench to Mr Connolly - someone whom he probably greatly admires, who has recently retired from Federal politics, a great and honest statesman, made very clear to me in personal conversations that difficult decisions have to be faced quickly because the people need time to adjust to the good sense of them. That was good advice.

I am sustained in that, Mr Speaker, when I look at the competent handling of these issues by the Chief Minister. No-one can deny, when you see him on the television or hear him on the air, that we have a solid hand at the tiller. It has been acknowledged, in any event, by members on the other side, and certainly was acknowledged gracefully by Mr

Connolly in one of his statements on radio recently. We thank him for that because that is the decent approach to it. Why can you not wait to have a go in 1992 and let us try to get the Territory organised until then? Then we will take you on. Then we will stand on our record, and you can stand on yours.

Mr Wood: You couldn't wait, could you?

MR COLLAERY: But you cannot do that. Sadly, even Mr Wood is starting to fire off a few salvos. The press have just asked me how I said on the floor today, in supporting a motion, that the Rally had joined the Liberal Party. This type of immature political response to the processes of the new Assembly is really doing none of us any good today.

We opposed a motion today that did not carry a logical conclusion, which Mr Wood moved. But it has gone out. Press comments have been made, and we have to put aside good ministerial time to put down all these pinpricks. We will, and the people will get sick of the diversions.

I have met some of the community groups that you worked over recently. I saw them afterwards. I met with them again, and I can assure you that they were reasoned meetings. They were grateful, in the main part, to hear the issues dispassionately and understand the problems of the Territory. That is a concession that you do not give Mr Humphries. He goes to meeting after meeting to be catcalled down by a sort of hired brigade of people - - -

Mr Berry: Rightly so.

MR COLLAERY: Yes, organised by our union organiser here.

We saw that during the election campaign - those funny faces of those people who asked questions at all those meetings, and some of them even turned up again as acolytes somewhere.

We know, Mr Speaker, that in dealing with this Supply Bill we will deal with that expenditure for the benefit of all Canberrans. It will not be for the benefit of the Liberal Party, the Rally or the Independents Group. It will be directed to the benefit of all Canberrans. That is the way we are doing it. It is also balanced government. You know full well - you will not admit it - that there might be a range of political views on this side of the floor but that they are well balanced, well met, and I am sure we do not have the arguments that you have in your little factional disputes. Certainly, we have this destabilising time coming up in 1992 when the Labor Party in the Territory has its perennial preselection squabbles, and we will see whether the left here, which has a temporary hold on the chamber, will be sustained in a cross-current to all the rest of the right-wing power in this country in the Labor Party.

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You want to talk about decency in considering the ordinary, common people. I ask you to look at the mortgage belt. Examine the conduct of the Federal Labor Party and what you have done in the Territory in the past - the sell-offs and the privatisations. There has been no greater privatisation in this Territory than that conducted by the Federal Labor Party. You know it. How about a little \$100m deal in Belconnen? How about a mall that was handed over and the peril in which it has put a lot of retail tenants as a result? How about some swimming pools? I could run you through a catalogue, Mr Speaker. Mr Berry knows that. He has slumped back in his chair. It has taken him by surprise. He is looking shocked because every time I get to my feet I really know how to land one on the Labor Party because I know how the mind works.

Adjournment

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

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

Mr Collaery: Mr Speaker, I require the question to be put forthwith without debate.

Question resolved in the negative.

MRS GRASSBY (4.29): I am not going to use words that Mr Berry used although, as I said, you can think them; as long as you do not say them, they cannot hang you. By their deeds they shall know them, and at the next election I think the people will tell them exactly how they feel about what they are doing. Mr Speaker, it is obvious that the Liberal coalition opposite intends to downgrade the level of services provided in the ACT. We have been in a very fortunate part of the world, and we have lived in a very beautiful city until now. I am not sure that we will be living like that for much longer when I see the cuts that this Government is going to make. This is understandable for a Liberal government which would have no commitment to social justice at all. I am not blaming it for that. That is not its policy. Why should it be? So I am not attacking it on that.

However, it is disappointing that its coalition partners, the Residents Rally and the no self-glory party, are prepared to stand by while the Chief Minister uses his knife to cut into some of the things that we have in this city, in which we have pride and which we believe should be left alone. At least the Residents Rally party pretended to have a commitment to social justice. It is obvious from the articles that appear in the paper from time to time that the Residents Rally executive still has some belief in

social justice and a compassionate government. It is unfortunate that the members that it has elected to this Assembly have completely abdicated that platform and are now more interested in self-glory than social justice.

On the other hand, we have the members of the no self-glory party, two of whom were formerly members of the public service and would probably claim to have many friends within the public service still. It is unfortunate that they are prepared to sit idly by while Mr Kaine uses his knife to cut into their former colleagues in the public service.

Mr Speaker, let me now turn to some of the major issues of the last six months. First of all, there was the closure of the Ainslie Transfer Station. People of Ainslie and surrounding suburbs were given very little notice that it was to close. It was done without any public consultation whatsoever. Apparently a recycling facility is to open at Mitchell, but the Minister for Finance and Urban Services is not able to say when that will be. He made the decision to close Ainslie Transfer Station without having made any decision on the Mitchell facility.

As for the big bins at shopping centres, I have had numerous complaints from residents of Ainslie who have been disturbed at all hours of the day and night by the sound of breaking glass and pick-up trucks. Mr Duby's only response is that the bins are like a halfway house for criminals. When will people of Ainslie and the surrounding suburbs get an honest answer from the Minister?

It is even more ironic that this Government claims that it is concerned about the greenhouse effect. Let me point out a couple of simple facts to Mr Duby. The round trip from Ainslie and surrounding suburbs to Belconnen tip is approximately 40 kilometres, and people will have to make it to dispose of their household waste and garbage. If approximately an extra 500 people a week have to make this trip, that means that the residents of those suburbs have to travel about a million kilometres extra a year to dispose of their rubbish. So much for Mr Duby's concern for the greenhouse effect! Any action that the ACT Government takes on the greenhouse effect will be more than offset by the extra fuel used by residents to take their rubbish to the tip. What a shortsighted decision the Government has made!

Since the closure of the Ainslie Transfer Station, I have also had a number of calls from residents of Ainslie and surrounding suburbs about the problems that they have experienced in disposing of bags of fallen leaves and acorns from their nature strips. I suggested to the residents that they contact Mr Duby and ask for help in the removal of the bags. You must remember that most of the trees on the nature strip this autumn are spreading many leaves. They were planted by the Government and are the Government's responsibility. Mr Jensen, from time to time,

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will tell you that people should compost these leaves, but, as residents have told me, there are more leaves than you could possibly compost and, what is more, it takes years to break these down and no ordinary householder could use them.

Mr Duby has also failed to act to preserve the rail service to the ACT, and this is another complaint of the people. Following the loss of the XPT in February, the changes announced by the New South Wales Government a couple of weeks ago will reduce the standard of our rail service from poor to virtually no service at all.

However, Mr Speaker, the New South Wales Government attempted to dress up the latest changes as being for the better. On the surface, it would seem that the replacement of the service arriving in Canberra at 4 am by one arriving at 10.30 pm was a change for the better. However, on closer examination it has turned out that the new service from Sydney was an existing commuter service which stopped at Strathfield, Liverpool, Macarthur and all other stops from Campbelltown to Goulburn. On most nights there was standing room only out of Sydney. So the New South Wales Government hoped that, by adding two carriages to this train, these problems would be overcome. This is highly doubtful, to say the least. But what has Mr Duby done about the New South Wales Government? It is the train that comes to Canberra; it is our train. It is not a commuter train for workers going in and out of Sydney.

Mr Humphries: We don't pay for the train.

MRS GRASSBY: But we need a train here. You do not give a damn about what is put on the road. You are talking about preserving our roads in the ACT. You have just put so many more buses and trucks on the roads that it is unbelievable.

The so-called morning service, which leaves Canberra at the ridiculously early time of 6.05, was also a commuter train that left Goulburn, all stops to Campbelltown, at 6.57 am. Two services to Canberra have been abolished and replaced by a Canberra extension to Goulburn services. The addition of Canberra passengers to these commuter services will in the short term result in overcrowding and in the long term lead to a further loss of patronage, giving the Greiner Government, which the Liberals will not worry about, another excuse to shut down the service completely. If you have nobody travelling on it because it does not work, why not shut it down?

Unfortunately, the Kaine Liberal Government made no protest to its Liberal colleagues in New South Wales about this further downgrading of the rail service. Rail passengers fell from the monthly average of nearly 24,000 in 1987-88 to less than 7,000 in March 1990. I think Mr Kaine, Mr Duby and Mrs Nolan will be pleased only when the rail service is abolished entirely. After all, Liberals and their partners do not travel by train. They travel first class, I understand, by plane.

Mr Speaker, let me now turn to the axing of the youth outreach worker program. It is ironic that when the Minister for Housing and Community Services, Bernard Collaery, was briefed on his paper Beyond the Burdekin Report he found out that his colleague Mr DUBY had axed the youth outreach worker program without consulting him. Mr Collaery, with his usual hypocrisy and "I am actually a small 'l' liberal" stance, wanted to help the youth of the ACT, but he did not have what it took to stand up to Mr DUBY and demand that the youth outreach worker program be retained. He simply let it slip. He may have been red faced, he may have been angry, but he took no action.

The other interesting story about axing the youth outreach worker program is that the ministerial advisory council on employment asked Mr DUBY to fully fund this program because it believed it was necessary for it to go ahead to tackle the high rate of youth unemployment in the ACT. Mr DUBY responded by saying that, as the program was not under way, he had decided not to fund it. Of course, this was untrue. There was already one officer working full-time on the program, who had been recruited in September last year, and other officers had been recruited and were ready to start work. Mr DUBY misled the advisory council and, in making his decision to axe the program, failed to consult with his ministerial colleague. But what is worse is that when Mr DUBY was approached by Mr Collaery over this matter Mr DUBY was unaware that the youth outreach worker program was part of his portfolio. Obviously Mr DUBY makes decisions without knowing what he is doing.

Mr Speaker, finally I would like to address the subject of housing. I must congratulate the Government on the Labor initiative of agreeing to sign the Commonwealth-State housing agreement. This is a very important agreement and will give the ACT access to money for public housing. It has also reduced some of my concern that public housing was to be sold off and the money that would be raised would be returned to the ACT Treasury. This opinion was being seriously considered by the Chief Minister when he came to power. Fortunately, the Commonwealth-State housing agreement will prevent this happening.

However, the Commonwealth-State housing agreement does not prevent the sale of housing, provided that the money is returned to public housing. This, of course, worries me because I understand there are houses to be sold off, obviously in the inner area where they are worth more money. Thus, public housing is going to be sent out to the backblocks of Canberra where there will not be any decent bus services. God help the people who have to live in them there!

It is quite possible that the Government would have sold off Northbourne Flats. To this day I seriously believe that the Minister for Housing, Mr Collaery, was thinking of the sale of those flats. It is only because the residents

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of Northbourne Flats took such strong action to oppose the underhanded sale of these flats that we still have them. I hope this has taught Mr Collaery a lesson, that the Government is not to have more secret negotiations. The amount of stuff that falls off the back of trucks and we get hold of is amazing.

Mr Speaker, Mr Collaery has covered a number of other areas, particularly the frightening attacks on health and education being carried out by Mr Humphries. I wish to add nothing to that debate because I think that my colleague Mr Berry did extremely well and got under the skin of many people in the Government with his speech. I think if he had been let go too much longer they would probably have had to leave the chamber. I also think my colleague Mr Wood did extremely well in the debate on education, so I will leave that to them.

This Government will obviously attack the public sector, for no better reason than that it will benefit their mates in private enterprise. I stand here and say now that this does not surprise me, coming from the Liberal Party. I am not surprised that it would attack the public service. That is normal. The public service is always attacked under a Liberal government, whether it be Federal, State or Territory, because it does not believe in it. The one thing that it does not understand is that the public service in this city is an industry. The public servants also buy in this city, spend their wages and pay taxes. They are part of this city. It is an industry, and therefore should not be attacked at every chance and cut, as it is.

What does surprise me is that the colleagues of the Liberal Alliance Government have been so quick to sell out their principles for the chance of just being in office and taking a ministerial salary. I am sure that the people of the ACT will visit retribution upon their heads at the next election, and I doubt whether we will see very many of them back in this house. From what I understand, from the way the people of Canberra feel - and I have been spending a lot of time going to school meetings and union meetings - I can tell you now a different story from what we would be led to believe by the Government. I am sure that at the next election the people will tell them exactly how they feel, Mr Speaker.

MR WOOD (4.45): Mr Speaker, the passage of the Supply Bill is the mechanism by which funds are made available for government purposes. It is an encouragement for us to look ahead to income and expenditure of government to see where it comes from, where it goes to. This debate and earlier debates today have revealed some interesting comments about the Government's thinking. It has shown us some of its priorities and how it operates. It has become clear today - even clearer than it was before - that the Government is better informed on how it is going to sell the schools than it is about managing the closures.

The debate has shown us the priority of the Government. It is looking for one-off economic benefits from the sale of school sites. It is quite prepared in that process to forget about the children in the schools. Mr Jensen made that clear today in his speech. He and I have no doubt the rest of the Government have given careful consideration to how those schools are to be sold and to maximise the income from them.

In debates also today and in recent times Mr Humphries has shown that he has not given that level of careful consideration to his management of school closures. Mr Humphries' management style is rather gung-ho. It was revealed today in the answer to a question he gave. I wrote it down rapidly as he spoke and I am pretty sure this is what the Hansard will reveal. Mr Humphries said, "When schools close, then we will examine buses and other incidental expenses". We will examine the need, I suppose is what he meant.

Mr Kaine: That is not what he said.

MR WOOD: We shall see the report tomorrow.

A member: When the decision is taken.

MR WOOD: When the decision is taken to close schools.

Mr Humphries: That is very different from saying "when they close".

MR WOOD: I accept that: "When the decision is taken to close schools, then we will look at buses and all those other things that need to be done". But surely, in any decent way of accounting and of considering what you have to do, you would know beforehand what those additional costs are going to be. I get as tired as Mr Humphries of having to push and push the point that he does not want to admit to. Before decisions are taken, because after you have taken the decision - - -

Ms Maher: Decisions have not been made yet.

MR WOOD: I am sorry; it is very difficult for you to accept this message. Once you make the decision to close a school, the decision is made. Then you are going to go down the path of seeing what buses are going to cost, what other facilities you are going to have to provide and all that.

Mr Collaery: Why do you think he issued a discussion paper, Bill?

MR WOOD: What discussion paper?

Mr Collaery: To cover all of the sequential ideas. You know that.

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MR WOOD: Mr Humphries has said time and time again until he is tired of saying it that he does not know those costs. He has gone down that path. He says he does not know them, and he will not know them until after the decisions have been taken. I believe that is entirely irresponsible.

Mr Collaery: He did not say that. It does not follow.

MR WOOD: Mr Humphries is determined not to provide a justification. He is refusing to do so.

Mr Humphries: The savings, not the costs.

MR WOOD: But you will not know the savings costs.

Mr Humphries: We do not know until we have decided in Cabinet what it will be.

MR SPEAKER: Order!

MR WOOD: But you do not even know what the savings of closing a school will be.

Mr Humphries: Yes, I do. It depends on which school it is.

Ms Maher: We do not even know whether we are going to close any schools, Bill, whether it be one or two.

MR WOOD: No, you are very thick on this. You do not want to go down that path of finding out the real cost of closing a school. You do not want to go down that path, I fear, because you do not want to know what that cost is.

Ms Maher: You are just not listening because you do not want to.

MR WOOD: I am listening most carefully.

MR SPEAKER: Order, Ms Maher, please!

MR WOOD: Having said that - and it has been a long debate and Mr Humphries is not going to concede he does not want to know what the real cost of school closure is going to be - I will proceed to other matters. I will focus on a couple of points that are not always well understood.

The demography of schools - the way that enrolments change, expand and contract over the years - is obviously a critical matter in education or planning. It is important for educational planners to know what the future enrolments are going to be - certainly to know as well as is possible to know. It is not an exact science. Projections are never entirely reliable; they simply cannot be. I believe that our Education Department over quite a long period of time has been as accurate as it is possible to be. I believe it is very good, but that also means that it makes

considerable mistakes from time to time. There was a time when it was considered that Narrabundah College needed to close. The passage of time has proved that that is not the case, and it is the same with Deakin High School. There are no small numbers of schools around the town that have been speculated about over a long period as maybe needing to close.

Mr Jensen: That was because of the faulty criteria, Bill.

MR WOOD: No, it was not at all. It was projected that those schools needed to close because the enrolments were going down, as simple as that. I was there; I was fairly closely involved at that time. When you answered an interjection the other day, you had projected yourselves to about five or six years after that. We were talking about two different periods of closure.

Mr Collaery: So you accept that closures happen all the time then in the Territory?

MR WOOD: I am talking about the enrolments going up and down. The fluctuation in enrolments makes it very clear that we have to be cautious about projections, and I think people generally are. Once we close a school and put town houses on the site, or whatever the Government proposes, that school cannot be reopened. People in parts of Canberra can now point to their school where the enrolments are increasing. Planners in days gone by, as I read in the paper today, had expected that the enrolment growth would be rather more rapid, though not as high of course, than has been the case in all of the relatively new areas of Canberra. We have to proceed with caution, but I am not sure that that is what we get.

I want to comment on what Mr Collaery was going on about late in his speech. He seemed concerned about a media release - I believe it to be one that Rosemary Follett put out - headed "Residents Rally now supports school closures". I do not know what his objection to that would be. Let me read the motion that Mr Collaery and other Rally members here today voted against. This is the motion they opposed: "That school closures are unnecessary and will severely diminish the quality of education in the ACT". I think the heading Ms Follett gave to her media statement, that the Rally supports school closures, is - - -

Mr Collaery: Totally illogical.

MR WOOD: Well, that will be for other people to decide. We framed that motion, Mr Collaery, expecting you to support it, because it seemed to be in keeping with what your party supporters were saying. We proposed a motion today saying we oppose school closures. Now, if you proposed that, I would have expected our support, but I do not see now, Mr Collaery, how you can possibly complain about Ms Follett's statement. It seems entirely accurate.

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Let me go on to the matter of small schools, or schools that are claimed to be small. I have been in schools, though I have not taught for extended periods in them, of 12 to 20 or 30 students. For the most part they have been excellent schools, and schools of that size have the potential to be truly outstanding. It is a shame in a sense that across Australia, though not in the ACT, schools of that size are diminishing in number. They are not appropriate for Canberra. I do not know what Uriarra's enrolment is. It might be getting down towards that number. But, apart from that school, they are not appropriate in Canberra. I would readily agree that in urban Canberra we should not have schools of that size.

The point I want to make is that small schools can be very good schools. The size of a school is not related to its quality. In fact, I will qualify that to one extent, that the larger a school gets - and I think we need to get over 1,000 for this - the more difficult it becomes to sustain quality. The very large schools become much more difficult to administer. But certainly there are no schools in Canberra of such a size as to make them difficult to manage. So when we debate the size of schools and say that schools have to close because they are small, I suggest it is a nonsense.

Mr Humphries: How small should a school be before it is closed?

MR WOOD: Well, it should be so small that you can demonstrate that it is no longer educationally viable. Now that is the size.

Mr Humphries: It is all relative, Bill.

MR WOOD: Well, then I would want to discuss a whole range of criteria with you on that matter so that we can demonstrate whether or not it is educationally viable - not economically viable, as you are talking about, but educationally viable. I think we demolished this morning any suggestions that they are not economically viable. There are no real savings to be made by closing schools. Let us understand that quality is not related to size.

I was concerned about a statement in the Priorities Review Board's document that says that larger schools mean more classes of acceptable levels. That causes me concern because it suggests that the review board did not fully understand how schools operate, or perhaps it may have expressed that poorly. Our schools are staffed on fairly well established and rather rigid formulas. Class sizes are established in that way and they are not able to be varied in any easy manner. In primary schools, for example, classes average around 30 students per class, quite large by Australian standards, and the formula is such that it does not vary. If your child is in a class of more than that, it is compensated by other classes that are

less than that, depending on just how the numbers at certain year levels fall.

I do not know what the Priorities Review Board is about. I do not think it understands the system, and in a few other places I think it says things that suggest that it has not had enough time properly to understand what education is about.

I will make one qualification. It is important at the secondary college level that there be a wide variety of courses. If their numbers fall, and I would not care to say at this stage to what level, it becomes more difficult to provide that wide range of courses. So I will make that qualification.

Mr Humphries: It is true in high schools as well to a large degree.

MR WOOD: Well, to a much lesser extent than the colleges, because they do not have that same flexibility. From the day they were given their staffing formulas, the colleges had that staffing flexibility, and the high schools were nowhere near as well resourced. I do not think the Priorities Review Board really understands that.

I want to make another comment about the Priorities Review Board and link it to Mr Collaery's statement. The board seems to be suggesting that we ought to be charging fees at post-compulsory level - that is, in our secondary colleges. Indeed, it is making a very clear statement.

Mr Kaine: I have already rejected that.

MR WOOD: Yes. I believe that has been rejected and I thank you for that. Maybe you will look more closely at this report and reject a whole host of other things.

Mr Collaery: Have you had time to read it?

MR WOOD: You have had a number of days before I got hold of it and you have numbers of other briefings, but in any case let me finish on this. It says a deal about the philosophy of the Priorities Review Board and I think it urges on us a caution about taking on too readily its submissions. I have no doubt Mr Collaery is very concerned about that social disadvantage problem that is inherent in any suggestion that we charge fees at years 11 and 12. Maybe he has already argued about that, and it must be one of the reasons the Government has rejected it. Even by noting that you have rejected it indicates that you have had some prior discussion about it. (Extension of time granted)

No doubt Mr Collaery will argue the severe social disadvantage that would follow if we charged all people to go to years 11 and 12. Bear in mind that there is a whole heap of other stuff in this report of similar philosophy. You ought to be looking at it very critically and I believe we have to question its worth entirely.

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MR CONNOLLY (5.00): Mr Speaker, the debate on the Supply Bill, which provides for the expenses of government in the next financial year until the next budget, provides the opportunity for members to comment generally on matters of public importance. This afternoon the Opposition has concentrated its remarks generally on the question of education. I propose in my rather more brief remarks this afternoon to continue that theme and to attempt to summarise the argument that the Opposition has put to this chamber.

Mr Speaker, there is no doubt that, despite the considerable concern that the community has over the matter that the Opposition raised yesterday - that of ministerial propriety - the big issue that will continue to dominate community discussion in Canberra for the next 18 months will be this Government's determination to slash and burn the high level and high quality of government services that have been provided to the community of Canberra.

It is all very well to adopt a rigid ideological stance and think that you can get away with cutting back on government service. The Liberal members of this Government - and we must give them the credit that they actually believe in what they are doing - believe that smaller government is better government and services should, where possible, be provided by the private sector rather than the public sector. They believe that there is something inherently better about a private sector service and inherently worse about a public sector service. They have seen what has happened in New South Wales and have some fantasy that in Canberra you can get away with the Greiner Government strategy. Well, I think they are in no doubt that they will not be able to get away with that.

It is all very well for Mr Greiner and Mr Metherell to target schools in isolated areas of western Sydney and shut them down. It is all very well for Mr Greiner to attack those sorts of communities that do not have particularly good resources to fight government decisions, but the Alliance Government is rapidly learning. Mr Collaery extolled Mr Humphries' virtues for his bravery at attending functions, and I give credit to Mr Humphries. He is prepared to go in and confront an angry community group and justify what he clearly believes in. He is finding, as you are all finding, that the Canberra community is very intelligent and articulate and will not take these attacks lying down. Virtually any school's parents and citizens board in Canberra will comprise a smattering of senior public servants, an academic or two, perhaps some senior officers in the defence service - people who are used to handling government decisions, used to handling information, used to arguing a case and presenting it in a public forum. That is exactly what is happening. The community of Canberra is organising, very effectively, against these cuts, and they will not let the Government forget that.

This morning a matter was debated which was referred to by Mr Collaery in his attack on Mr Wood's press release. We put before this Assembly the opportunity for members to stand up and be counted on school closures, and they did. Those members of the Rally, in particular, who stood up and were counted voted firmly against our motion to oppose school closures. You will not be forgotten for those remarks, let me assure you of that. It is not I who am making the threat; it is those members of the Canberra community.

How has the Government responded to the Opposition's attacks? Well, it responded in much the way that it has responded to other attacks in the short period I have been in this chamber, and for me it is the most surprising feature of the way this chamber conducts its business. Essentially the Government's response degenerates to personal attacks on the members of the Opposition. I am surprised and staggered at the level of personal invective that emerges from the Government front bench, and it is, of course, at a very high intellectual level!

Dr Kinloch: You hypocrite.

Mr Berry: On a point of order, Mr Speaker; Mr Connolly was just described as a hypocrite by that person.

MR SPEAKER: Order! I do not believe that is unparliamentary language.

MR CONNOLLY: Mr Speaker, I made a decision in my first few days in this Assembly not to degenerate to that level, and I do not propose to now. I was referring to the high level of intellectual contribution that is made in these personal attacks from members opposite. Mr Collaery, in the period that I have been here, has made the startling and witty remarks that Mr Berry is tall and on occasion wears shiny shoes. He seems to take a morbid fascination in my ties. Both yesterday and today he has made remarks concerning the colour, style, or other unknown quality of my necktie. Now, Mr Speaker, that is an extraordinarily trivial way to conduct government business.

Ms Maher: Well, why bring it up again?

MR CONNOLLY: Because I want it recorded in Hansard and I think it is important that the people of Canberra see it.

Mr Duby: You wanted "yap, yap, yap" recorded yesterday.

MR CONNOLLY: And indeed it was, Mr Duby, and I think it is most important that Hansard records the intelligent and constructive contribution that members of the Government have made by going "yap, yap, yap". Today, we have heard remarks addressed to "Labor scrubbers".

Members interjected.

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Mr Berry: The behaviour of the rabble opposite is unforgivable and it is about time they were pulled into gear.

MR SPEAKER: Order! Please settle down.

MR CONNOLLY: Government members are demonstrating my point far better than I could hope to in any debate by their continued infantile performances. "Scrubbers", "stupidity", "drongos" - these are the remarks from senior Government front benchers directed to the Opposition. Today we have heard the last desperate gasp of the conservative. Yesterday, in a desperate attempt to justify what was or was not a criminal charge, we saw recourse to a 1957 High Court judgment and today we are back to the 1950s and the Government attack on the Opposition - "Marxists, socialists, Soviets". What a pathetic performance! Please, Mr Collaery, continue these remarks for the next 18 months into an election campaign. We will be delighted if that is the level of contribution that we will get from the Government.

The Chief Minister, who I would have thought should stand somewhat above these low-level remarks, enters into the fray. Yesterday afternoon - I was going to raise this by way of matter of personal explanation, but I prefer to do it now and hope to hear his response - he engaged in some rather frantic insults directed at me concerning gatecrashing some function. Now, Mr Kaine, explain what you were talking about. Try to justify it. I think it was very pathetic. Put it on record. You will find, Mr Kaine, that it is merely a trashy schoolyard insult and I think that that is appalling. You accused me yesterday, as I recorded it, of gatecrashing some function. Explain to me and explain to the citizens of Canberra what you meant by that, because you will find that you cannot.

They were my comments on the style of debate in this chamber. Let me return to the substance. Again, we were attacked today. It was said that the Opposition was being hypocritical because we had consistently criticised the Government for attempting to balance the budget by looking only at the expenditure side and not at the revenue side. Our leader was attacked for these remarks. What an extraordinary conclusion for Labor to come to, to suggest that the Government was committed to the expenditure side and not the revenue side.

Mr Kaine's 10-point budget strategy for the ACT of last year was rather George Bush-like in its certainty. No increases in taxes was the bottom line of the Liberal Party's budgetary policy for self-government: "There will be no increases in taxes under our strategy. That is our absolute commitment and it is on that basis that we have worked out our budget strategy". So we have a bottom line and an absolute commitment not to increase taxes.

Well, very good; that is an ideological stance that the Liberal Party can come from. As I have explained, we do not criticise the Liberal Party for having firmly held beliefs. We disagree with those beliefs fundamentally, but we do not criticise them for being hypocrites or anything like that for fundamentally believing in smaller government, smaller taxes, lower government services. We favour a higher level of government.

We take the view that certain government services - and education is at the top of our list - are so essential to providing social justice that the community must make the decision. The Liberal Party's move towards privatisation is based on the assumption that individuals are best equipped to make the decisions about the educational opportunities for their children and, at the end of the day, it comes down to a larger private education sector and a sort of safety net public education sector to provide a modicum of educational opportunity for the rest of the community. Well, we fundamentally reject that.

Because of those statements we were being critical of the Government for its excessive attack on slashing government expenditure and its refusal to look at other taxation options. We now know that the absolute commitment to taxation is not an absolute commitment to taxation - watch my lips, as George Bush said - and we know that there will be increased taxes. Our criticism there, and our leader will respond fully to this, is that it will not be equitable across the community; it will favour the business sector and not attack the rest.

If taxation increases do not equitably fall on business and private individuals, you can legitimately be criticised, and you will be. But the Government seems committed to and locked into its strategy of massive assault on the public sector in Canberra. We on this side of the house will continue to oppose that. We will continue, and we are quite happy and proud indeed to say that we will continue, to help community groups mobilise to oppose your drastic cuts. We are certain and confident that when the time comes you will be weighed and found wanting, as my colleague Mrs Grassby said.

MR DUBY (Minister for Finance and Urban Services) (5.12), in reply: Mr Speaker, before I commence my comments I would like to refute the matters raised today in the debate, particularly by Mr Berry, in what I regard as his totally unfounded, unwarranted and scurrilous attacks on the Chief Minister's personal integrity. I would like to put it on record that in my view there is no-one in this Assembly whose personal integrity comes anywhere near that of the Chief Minister.

Mr Berry: Lots of laughter on your side of the house, especially from Mrs Nolan.

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MR DUBY: I am including every member of this Assembly. I think it is insulting and degrading to have these matters discussed in such a way in this Assembly. Mr Speaker, in the arguments that we have heard today in relation to the discussion of this Supply Bill, Opposition members have taken the opportunity to use this time to basically, I suppose, criticise and carp and once again show their lack of economic ability in criticising this Government's economic proposals and the hard, necessary steps it has taken in addressing the terrible situation that the ACT fiscus finds itself in.

I shall not repeat the arguments so very well put by my colleagues Mr Humphries and Mr Collaery, who put forward many facts. None of the Opposition speakers have been able to answer those facts or have queried them, and certainly none have been able to address any issue that was raised about what the Opposition proposed to do anyway. Throughout the debate we have heard many, many times the argument that there really is not a problem, that if you keep saying it long enough and loudly enough there is not a problem, that these are figures invented by the Chief Minister.

Mr Speaker, it is a fact that Commonwealth funding for the ACT has been guaranteed in real terms only for the first two years of self-government. For those who cannot read, that is the period 1989-90 and 1990-91. In June 1991 the Commonwealth ceases its guarantee of funding. For practical purposes, and given the track record of any Commonwealth guarantees anyway, we should not assume that any further financial assistance from the Commonwealth will be forthcoming. As a matter of fact, I can almost guarantee that it will not. I think it is a very sensible and courageous action of this Government to work on that basis and not to live in fantasyland, which the Opposition clearly wishes to do, and rely on Uncle Bob on the hill.

Opposition members also seem to refute the statements of Senator Walsh. They keep saying, "Who is this man?". Well, of course, he was the guru of Labor economics for so many years but, now that he has gone, he is to be despised. The fact is that Senator Walsh stated on 14 December 1989, "It is the belief of the Department of Finance that the level of overfunding has now reached about \$100m". Senator Walsh said that. Are you going to deny it? It was said on the advice of the extraordinarily efficient - according to you folk - Federal Department of Finance. It is a simple fact and it cannot be denied.

Mr Berry: You are not even going to bother checking the figures. What a bunch of dills! What a Treasurer! He will not even check the figures.

MR DUBY: Listen to them, chattering like parakeets. The fact is that it has been said and they will not deny it. They say Senator Walsh must be wrong or Senator Walsh did not say it. He did.

In addition, the current Minister for Territories, Mr Simmons, when asked to comment about the hard decisions that the ACT Government has to make in regard to education, health and other services on the basis of the fact that we have inadequate funding guarantees from the Commonwealth, said on 20 April this year that the ACT is in for a big shock because the reality is we are living in tough economic times and people expect governments to make decisions.

Making decisions is something that the previous Labor Government was incapable of doing. The only decision it seemed to make in the whole time that it was in government was: "Let us not make a decision because that is too hard. Let us put it to a consultative committee. Let us throw it up in the air and see how it lands". That is the sort of response we had for seven months. As a result of that, this Government is now having to take those hard decisions. We are actually doing the hard work for those Labor Ministers, because they were too lazy, too scared or too incompetent to do such things.

The Labor Government during its seven months demonstrated - and Labor members continue to demonstrate it now that they are in opposition - that they are bankrupt in ideas, in leadership and in policies. If they were allowed to apply their economic and political theories on the ACT, they would bankrupt this Territory. Mr Speaker, let us get on with the job, let us pass this Supply Bill and let this Government get on with doing a bit of work.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Bill agreed to in principle.

Leave granted to dispense with the detail stage.

MR SPEAKER: The question is that this Bill be agreed to. Those of that opinion say "aye"; to the contrary "no".

Mr Moore: No.

Mr Collaery: Mr Moore is opposing supply. That should be noted, Mr Speaker.

MR SPEAKER: I think the ayes have it.

Bill agreed to.

ADJOURNMENT

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

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

Backstage Cafe

MR WOOD (5.20): Mr Speaker, I want to use this time to make a plea on behalf of the Backstage Cafe that it should be able to continue to exist. The Backstage Cafe is a very well used, small venue in Mort Street that provides theatre and other entertainment to the people of Canberra. Going back 12 or 13 years ago when I came to Canberra, Domenic Mico, who now runs the Backstage Cafe, was doing a remarkable job in the ACT with innovative and exciting programs. He has carried that on in a variety of ways over many years. He has provided stimulation to countless numbers of ACT children and to adults and he has provided clear leadership in one area of the arts in the ACT.

Just less than a year ago, he undertook a new venture at the Backstage Cafe. I would make clear also that it is a private enterprise business. There is no government funding in it, and maybe that creates some problems. In that time he has conducted 17 shows and six concerts over many nights. He has had three art exhibitions, nine poetry readings, two book launchings, three community arts events and three workshops; he took one production to Melbourne, another production for a week at the Playhouse, and has had three nights of new play readings. He works very hard at it and I believe provides leadership to this community in the area of community arts and in small productions.

It is a marginal business for him. He will not be able to survive the shock that is coming to him as the building he is in closes down for a period of some months. The action of this Government, well intentioned - and I do not criticise what is happening - may nevertheless lead to his bankruptcy. We provided funding of \$330,000 or so to rebuild the TAU Theatre which sublets the area to him, to renew it and do a great deal of important work. I think that is great. But in that period the toilet will be knocked down. He runs licensed premises, and he has pretty well to close down in that period. If it were not such a marginal operation by virtue of what he does, he may have been able to survive. The irony in this situation is that, if he had been supported more from community funds, he probably would have had some community protection; but because it is a commercial operation, there seems to be no protection available to him. I want to make the plea because of the remarkable service that Mr Mico provides to the ACT - no-one else in this community can provide the range of things that he does - that we ought to give some special consideration to him and to the Backstage Cafe.

I have taken this argument through to the Minister for the Arts. Perhaps it was in the wrong direction. I do not deny Mr Humphries' interest and good intentions. It is simply that he has not been able to find a mechanism to help Mr Mico. Perhaps I should have taken this through the small business area or some other area in the Government

where assistance may have been forthcoming. I ask Government Ministers to examine their programs and to see what might be done to save what I believe is a highly desirable small business and very important arts enterprise.

Backstage Cafe

MR HUMPHRIES (Minister for Health, Education and the Arts) (5.24): Mr Speaker, I feel it is appropriate for me to respond to Mr Wood. Let me indicate that on the part of members of the Government there is not any constitutional reluctance to consider the proposal put by Mr Mico and supported in the Assembly today by Mr Wood. I have to say at the outset that I do not consider, as Mr Mico has argued, that the Government has a legal liability towards him. I have sought legal advice from the Government's Law Office on the question and accept the advice that there is not any legal liability there. It should be noted that Mr Mico supported the application by the TAU Theatre for refurbishment, which application was granted. As a result, Mr Mico's business has, as Mr Wood has explained, been put in jeopardy.

I should, however, point out that one of the reasons why it has been necessary to reject the application to me by Mr Mico, in the form he put it to me, was that in the funds for arts programs in the ACT at the time that I came into the position of Minister for the Arts there was absolutely no money available at all. Not one red cent was left in the arts budget for 1990. I ask members to bear in mind that I took office as Arts Minister on 5 December 1989. I very much regret that circumstance. I am sure that the things that were funded by Ms Follett, my predecessor as Minister for the Arts, were all very worthy, and I have no disagreement with any of the things she funded. I have to say that I regret, however, the fact that there was no money left for contingencies that might arise during 1990. This instance is one such contingency.

I have not dismissed the possibility of being able to assist Mr Mico in some fashion - I am currently exploring avenues for doing that - but I have to indicate at this stage that the Government cannot provide money simply because a small business is in difficulty. That is not the philosophy of this Government or any previous government, to my knowledge, in the ACT. It is not possible, as I have indicated, to provide money from the arts budget, other than money that has already been allocated. However, there may be ways around this problem and I am exploring those, I can assure Mr Wood, with all my strength at the present time.

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Mental Health

MR BERRY (5.26): Earlier on today there was discussion about the distortion of figures by this Government. The issue of ethics was also dodged by the Government by ensuring that the time for private members' business was exhausted. This Government is unethical in many of the ways that it operates and of course we have focused on that in the last day or so in relation to - - -

Mr Collaery: I rise on a point of order, Mr Speaker. I refer to standing order 59, which states that a member may not anticipate discussion of any subject which appears on the notice paper.

MR BERRY: I withdraw it, to make it easy.

Mr Collaery: I believe that Mr Berry has made clear that, having missed his debate this morning, he wishes to use adjournment time.

MR BERRY: I withdraw that. This Government opposite is a government of hypocrisy.

Mr Humphries: You opposed the use of that word earlier today. Now you are using it yourself. It is a double standard, is it not?

MR BERRY: Well, the standard is set, and we will use it to death. It is a government of hypocrisy, a government without morality. I was taken to task on that one before. Does anybody want to do it again?

Mr Humphries: Well, what about scruples, compassion?

MR BERRY: It has not any of those either. This comes into focus because last week was Schizophrenia Awareness Week in the ACT and there has not been a word by the Minister for Health in relation to mental health services as a result of a very important week passing in the ACT as it relates to the delivery of mental health services in the Territory. This Government has shown a sneering contempt for the delivery of mental health services. In the first place, it took Labor's repeated exposure - - -

Mr Humphries: What a load of rubbish!

MR BERRY: You are not getting off free - take your pill. It took repeated exposure of Minister Collaery's failure to spend budget funds and the tragic death of a mentally ill detainee to shock the Government into any signs of action to spend money already targeted for the mentally ill.

Mr Humphries: I raise a point of order, Mr Speaker. Under the standing orders clearly Mr Berry is anticipating a debate later on, tomorrow, or whenever it might occur. Under standing order 59 he ought not to be transgressing this issue at this stage.

MR BERRY: Pull me up and it could cause you some difficulties.

MR SPEAKER: I believe you are anticipating discussion, Mr Berry. Please get onto something else.

MR BERRY: Mr Speaker, the adjournment debate is historically wide open as to the topics to be raised.

It is an issue of importance that Schizophrenia Awareness Week passed by last week and the Government opposite has not even mentioned the fact. It is as if it never happened. This Government has failed over and over again. It took Labor's repeated exposure of Minister Collaery's behaviour and the death of a mentally ill detainee to shock him into a position where he would agree to spend that money. The best the Minister could do was answer, yes, that facility would be built at the Belconnen Remand Centre, but admitted that there were no plans at all. It was another knee-jerk response to a tragedy. Mr Humphries announced that the Government had decided to save \$150,000 by withdrawing funds targeted to redress the underfunding of mental health services in the ACT.

Mr Humphries: I rise on a point of order, Mr Speaker. I refer you once again to standing order 59, which clearly indicates that a member may not anticipate the discussion on any subject appearing on the notice paper. There is on the notice paper a clear discussion about the \$150,000 service to which Mr Berry refers. Clearly, Mr Berry is in breach of standing order 59 and ought to be asked to withdraw comments and not debate the issues on that matter.

MR SPEAKER: Your objection is upheld there, Mr Humphries. Mr Berry, I believe that you are in contempt of the standing orders by proceeding in that manner, so please divert to something else.

MR BERRY: This Minister failed to make any comment about Schizophrenia Awareness Week and has failed to provide services to those people as a result of the desperate plea of the mentally ill in the ACT. This Minister and this Government are an absolute disgrace to Canberra and will be so regarded by those who care for the mentally ill throughout Australia.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Assembly adjourned at 5.32 pm