



DEBATES

OF THE

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

FOR THE

AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

HANSARD

11 December 2001

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MR SPEAKER (Mr Berry) took the chair at 10.30 am, made a formal recognition, and asked members to stand in silence and pray or reflect on their responsibilities to the people of the Australian Capital Territory.

Petition

The following petition was lodged for presentation.

Gungahlin Drive

by **Mr Corbell**, from 1,249 residents:

To the Speaker and members of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory

This petition of certain residents of the Australian Capital Territory draws to the attention of the Assembly that:

The Department of Urban Services is intending to release and sell a block of land, section 79, block 3, adjacent to Giralang Primary School and Preschool on the west corner of Canopus Street and Menkar Close.

These residents are very concerned about the impact on the environment of the school as a result of building townhouse dwellings on this site. In particular, the residents are concerned about the security of the school and the children, and increased traffic congestion. The information now available from the report dated 15 October 2001 and commissioned by the Giralang P & C, *Block 3 Section 79 Giralang*, author Mike Stapleton—*Town Planning Consultant* that has been provided to Planning and Land Management in the Department of Urban Services, strongly supports the basis for these concerns.

An alternative land use proposal to build a community garden park addresses the community's concerns raised in a previous petition tabled in the last Legislative Assembly and at the public meeting held on 25 October 2001. A community garden park in keeping with the original "community use" purpose for this land, is now being developed, through the work of the Giralang Action Group, an active group that includes membership from the Giralang community and Giralang Primary School P & C Association, and the Ginninderra Creek Catchment Landcare Group.

Your petitioners therefore request that the Assembly, as an urgent priority, review the release and sale of this land for the purpose of residential development, and immediately:

- take account of the further information now available on the impact of residential development on this site;
- and support the alternative land use proposal of building a community garden park.

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

Distinguished visitors

MR SPEAKER: Members, before we move to the next item of business, I would like to acknowledge that, during the morning, Senators Lundy, Bartlett, Stott Despoja, Ridgeway and Sherry may be in the building from time to time. Thank you, members.

Inaugural speeches

MR PRATT: Mr Speaker, I ask for leave of the Assembly to make my inaugural speech.

Leave granted.

MR SPEAKER: Before I call Mr Pratt, I would like to remind members that this is an inaugural speech and it is the tradition that we hear such speeches in silence.

MR PRATT: Mr Speaker, today marks a very special occasion, not only for me but also for all those people who have stood by me and believed and fought for me, particularly over the past two years.

Two years ago, while working for Care Australia, I was incarcerated in a Yugoslav jail, not knowing whether I would ever walk again in the sunlight of an Australian summer or through the Australian bush, watch the breakers on an Australian surf beach or enjoy that most Australian of all pursuits, a couple of beers with old mates. Yesterday, Mr Speaker, I was reminded of my ordeal when honoured to meet the remarkable Peter Bunch and Diana Thomas, unlawfully jailed by the Taliban 3½ months ago in Afghanistan.

The road that led me to a prison cell in Belgrade also led me to stand here in our Legislative Assembly. As the new Liberal member for Brindabella, I must first thank the people of Brindabella, who have, by supporting me, given me the opportunity to serve them. To them I say thank you, I will not let you down. I pledge to do my utmost to represent you in every way I can to the best of my ability.

Mr Speaker, I would also like to thank my wife, Samira Baqatada, for her support and patience through the hardest days of our lives, and I thank her for the gift of our daughter, Yasmina. I would also like to thank my son, Haydon Pratt, for his love, understanding and patience over these rather tumultuous 12 months.

I would also like to thank my campaign workers—if I may be generic here—that little band of brothers, men and women who stood by me, and worked tirelessly in my campaign to win the seat in Brindabella. I owe my thanks to Daniel and Melissa Clode, Tina Faulk, Margaret Head, Nellena Garland, Peter Polkinghorne, Harsh Puri, Judith Bascom and many, many others.

I would also like to thank my Liberal colleagues, candidates who campaigned in Brindabella: Winifred Rosser, Megan O'Connor, Steve Dozpot and Brendan Smyth. In Brindabella, the Liberal campaign was very much a team effort, one that was integral to winning back the second seat. After integrity, I place the very highest value on teamwork and loyalty.

Finally, I wish to dedicate this win to that great political watcher and supporter, my mother, Mavis Pratt, who sadly passed away just three weeks prior to the election.

Mr Speaker, the events of 11 September have changed our lives and our world, despite the fact that Canberra is a world away from New York, in another hemisphere, another time zone, on another continent. Inescapably now, we are one world. There is no longer a first, second or third world in the sense that our borders are porous, our coastline penetrable, the economy global. The tragedies of the poorest countries in our region become our concerns, our responsibilities. We cannot escape them. Events in Kabul or Dili may affect our lives almost as much as those in Civic Square or Martin Place. Yet, though our world is shrinking, our sense of place—in the Aboriginal sense—grows stronger.

Our place, Canberra, in this, our lucky country, Australia—which really is a lucky country when compared to so many others—has truly been blessed in being a tolerant, compassionate and, in the main, an harmonious society. However, the price of such social cohesion is eternal vigilance.

If, on 10 September, someone had warned of a terrorist attack on the mightiest financial centre and military nerve centre of the United States, would anyone have listened seriously? Here in Australia we cannot afford to be complacent, for to be lulled into complacency—believing that it never would, never could, happen here—is to ignore reality at our peril.

My great concern is that, in our somewhat laconic Australian way, we continue to think that we are divorced from “these troubles overseas”. However, that is no longer true, in this shrinking world. To that end we have a duty here in the ACT to educate our citizens so that they understand that these troubles can now touch our nation, and the ACT, the seat of federal power and diplomatic representation.

I strongly believe that we have a duty as a nation to do everything humanly possible to intervene in a humanitarian way in the world’s trouble spots, and we, the ACT community, must lead the way. For it is by humanitarian intervention that we contribute to resolving conflict, to the early resolution of refugee problems on the ground, and, last, to encouraging the development of a truly civil society in those countries. Hopefully, these efforts will lead to the eventual development of a rough but workable democracy in those places, therefore contributing to world peace.

The ACT, an affluent and one of Australia’s most educated communities, has a duty to lead the way in our international commitments. To this end, we, as a community, are uniquely positioned to lobby the federal government to increase its overseas humanitarian and development assistance. We in the ACT should support our credible Australian overseas aid agencies, such as Care Australia, the Australian Red Cross, and World Vision Australia, which, by the way, are all headquartered here in Canberra.

Finally, in terms of our humanitarian responsibility, I believe we should ensure that new sister city relationships are selected on the basis that we can help those cities materially, politically and philosophically to reach for stability and peace. I think, for example, a Canberra/Dili sister city proposal, as put forward by the former Liberal government, is a very good idea.

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I mentioned before that we live in a lucky country. Indeed, here in Canberra, we live in one of the freest and most beautiful cities in this world. In addition, we live in a country of whose history, democratic traditions and vibrant multicultural society we can be proud. I believe, in terms of our children's education and media perceptions, that it is imperative we emphasise the positives of our nation's history.

To that end, I decry the black armband view of our history, and the bleatings of a vocal elite proclaiming, "Shame to be Australian". I, and the majority of Australians, are heartily tired of this take on our nation's history. We are concerned about the misrepresentation of our history, and its effect on the perceptions of our children, and those of future generations.

As someone who has worked with the war ravaged, the homeless and the destitute, and with those who have seen their homelands overcome by some immense and implacable catastrophes, such as war, famine and other natural disasters, I am determined that such hopelessness and defeat will never be suffered by Australians. In the words of that great Australian poet, Mary Gilmore:

no foe shall gather in our harvest, or sit on our stockyard rail.

Paradoxically, the answer does not lie in maximising our defence capabilities, vital to our national security though they may be. The best defence of a nation used to be its soldiers. Today, as shadow minister for education, I believe the answer lies in giving young Australians the best, most comprehensive education that we, as a nation, can afford. Our most important asset is our youth, and in their hands lies the future and integrity of our nation. As reported this week by the OECD survey, the ACT has one of the best education systems in the world, the legacy of the former Liberal government.

It is my job to defend the current ACT education capability and ensure that it is not eroded. More importantly, however, it is to move on and encourage upgrades in the ACT system aimed at meeting the needs and aspirations of the ACT community now and in the future. Our current system of schooling could provide better customer satisfaction, otherwise parents would not be demonstrating their increasing lack of faith in public education by voting with their feet and enrolling their children in non-government schools.

More children are enrolled in non-government schools than ever before, while enrolments in state schools have stagnated. This is not a reflection on the ACT: it is part of a nationwide trend, and the reason for it must be addressed. The government system must be reinforced.

However, for now we must also acknowledge this movement to non-government schools and we must accommodate that trend as well. We must see the non-government sector as an important component of the overall ACT education system. Parents' decisions to send children to non-government schools often means considerable financial sacrifices. Students in non-government schools are not entitled to the same level of taxpayer-funded financial support as their peers in government schools.

However, the distinction between public funding of education and public provision of education continues to be blurred. By granting all students an equal educational subsidy, we could allow families to choose which school at which to spend their subsidy—public or private—thus creating motivation and incentives for schools to provide even better education for their students.

Overseas research has indicated that allowing parents choice in schooling reaps not only academic but also significant social and financial benefits. One way to provide choice might be through tax credits, allowing parents with school-age children to claim educational expenses up to a specified amount against their tax liability. This process would cut out the government middleman and see parents' money paid directly to the schools. Another way might be the introduction of charter schools, public schools that are publicly owned and funded but self-governed under the terms of a performance contract. I believe these options should be explored, and I would like to do that.

This leads me to another fundamental plank of ACT education, our teachers, into whose hands we entrust our students, our most important asset. I am pleased to see the teachers federation encouraging the use of professional development as the basis for promotion. I trust the government will continue to support this fundamentally important system, for our teachers should stand first ranked amongst our community's professionals. I will seek new ways to maintain and further develop the vitally important teacher capability in the ACT and encourage government to add value to our current ACT system.

Other priority areas I wish to address include boys' education, the teaching of values in schools, fitness and health, the problem of school bullying and violence, the vexatious issue of drugs education, the problem of class sizes and the dilemma that we have with children with special needs.

In the 21st century, we need more than strong defence forces: we need the best brains, and the most agile minds, and those minds need a diet of the best, most innovative and sound education policies that we can devise. By the end of the new century, if Australians are both lucky and wise, I think we will be in better shape than when we started.

Whether this becomes a reality, of course, depends fundamentally on how we educate our children and their children after them. I hope I may be allowed to play some part in this transition. Thank you, Mr Speaker.

MS MacDONALD: Mr Speaker, I ask for leave of the Assembly to make my inaugural speech.

Leave granted.

MS MacDONALD: It is with a sense of honour, humility and great excitement that I rise to address the Assembly today. I am honoured and humbled by the faith that the people of Brindabella have shown in both the Australian Labor Party and me. I am excited not only by my own election but by the election of the Labor Party to government, and the potential of these developments to help improve the lives of the people of Canberra.

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In my election, the Australian Labor Party has achieved some historic firsts. This is the first time, under the Hare-Clark system in the ACT, that a major party has won three seats in a five-seat electorate. It is also the first time that a government in this territory has won eight seats. Indeed, we only just missed out on having a ninth member elected, and I am sorry that Susan McCarthy is not making her inaugural speech here today, having lost by only 300 votes.

I believe that the results of the last election were an indication by the people of Brindabella and Canberra that they wanted a change. While I believe that the hard work that I put into my election campaign earned me many personal votes, there were many other people who voted for me as a representative of the Australian Labor Party, and particularly as a Labor woman.

I mentioned my excitement at the potential that this the new Labor government has to improve the lives of the people of this town. Of all the areas in which I know Labor can make a positive difference, education and training are two of the most important. Those who know me know of my great passion for education and training. From a young age, it was my intention to become a teacher of deaf children. My career path took a different turn and I decided not to practise my primary teaching qualification, but I have remained committed to quality education and training accessible by all. In particular, I have become focused on the importance of vocational education and training.

Fewer than 30 per cent of students leaving high school go on to study at university. The 1996 census states that Canberra, out of all Australian cities, had the highest proportion of people in the work force with a university qualification, at 27.9 per cent. Equally importantly, the 1996 census also tells us that 48.8 per cent of the labour force in Canberra had no post-school qualifications.

We are all aware that Australia has an ageing population, and it is estimated that people will have between five and 10 different careers in their lifetimes. These figures highlight the growing importance of the training system in our society.

There is a view held by many in our society, especially within the educational sectors, that the only way for young people to get a job, a “real career”, is to go to university. With over 70 per cent of high school leavers not continuing to university, this societal view sets young people up for a fall. It provides them with unrealistic expectations and goals. It also means that they are not properly preparing themselves for their future careers.

I also believe that it creates a sense of despair for young people. Much has been said in this place, and in the press, about the drug problem in our society. There has also been much justifiable concern about the high level of youth suicide. It is my personal belief that these two issues can be firmly linked to young people’s sense that they have no future prospects.

We need to give young people a future. We need to tell our young people that there are many valid career pathways. We should be telling them that university is only one option among many. They should also know that university might be an option that comes to them at a point later on in life.

The statistics that I mentioned earlier also tell us that nearly half of Canberra's working population does not have a post-secondary educational qualification; that is, they have undertaken no formal training since the day they last walked out of the high school gates. These rates were shown to be higher in the Tuggeranong suburbs of Richardson, Chisholm, Gilmore, Banks, Gordon and Conder, where the number of people without qualifications after high school was over 59 per cent of the population.

I find these statistics very alarming for the following reasons: people in the work force without a formal qualification are less likely to have their skills recognised and are likely to be lowly paid. With the population ageing, unless action is taken, we will have a steadily de-skilled population. Action must be taken. It is my belief that governments around this country need to do more than just pay lip service to the idea of lifelong learning. People at all stages of life should have access to, and encouragement to undertake, training to upgrade their skills. They should also receive recognition for the skills that they have learned on the job.

I believe, like many others on all sides of politics, that the great hope for all of our society can be realised through education and training. I also believe that a better educated and trained society can only be a better community overall. As a new member of the new Labor government, I hope to be able to assist in bringing about the changes that will give all of our society this hope and a better future.

While I am on the subject of society, there is another issue that I wish to discuss. My perception of Australian society over the last six years is that we have become insular and less caring about our fellow citizens. As an observer of history, and of my own family history, I find this very disturbing. Many people are unaware that I am Jewish. It is not a common thing to find a Jew with the surname of MacDonald, but here I am. In fact, my mother is Jewish and my dear dad converted to Judaism after he and mum married.

My maternal grandparents were German Jews. Opa had the foresight to see what was happening in Nazi Germany. He moved my grandmother and my infant mother out of Germany to England before the start of the war. My grandparents did make application to move to the United States but could not get a sponsor and were denied entry. However, they were lucky enough to be offered places in this country, and there has been many a time that I have been grateful that they came to Australia and did not go to the United States.

The experiences of my mother and grandparents were not unique. They were very lucky, in comparison to many others in similar circumstances, to be able to gain access to such a wonderful country. However, it is my belief that my grandparents made a huge contribution to many aspects of this country, not least through their contributions to culture and work.

For all the denials of the practitioners of wedge politics, the parallels with what has been taking place in this country and Nazi Germany are there to be seen by those who will look. They are subtle, but becoming less so. People in this country have been put under so much pressure by the erosion of core services and values that consequently they have sought to scapegoat those who are different. In 1933, the German people allowed Hitler to become their dictator. They gave up democracy and believed that the reason for their

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troubles was the Jews, the unionists, the intellectually disabled, and the Slavs. In other words, those who were different.

While I do not believe that the people of this country would give up their democracy, there has been too much “us and them” behaviour. As I said earlier, my grandparents contributed a great deal to this country. They were not unique, and there have been countless immigrants to this country who contributed pieces to the puzzle of our Australian society, our Australian community. I will always speak against the policy of xenophobia, so that this rich tapestry of Australian life can continue to flourish.

I ask the indulgence of the Assembly to allow me to talk a little about my background and my family. I grew up in Sydney and believe that I had a fortunate childhood. My parents instilled in me the values that later in life led me naturally to join the Labor Party. Dad was always a strong Labor man, although not a member of the party. My mother was a swinging voter but always gave her preference to the Labor Party. My earliest political discussion was in first grade at Coogee South Public School. The debate was about whom to vote for in the 1974 federal election. Of course, I was advocating Gough Whitlam.

While Labor was always the political flavour of our household, there was no time when I and my older brother, David, were not encouraged to think about politics, the way we would vote, and why. The principles of equity, access to quality education and a safety net for society were held dear in my family.

It has always been my opinion that I had the best dad in the world. Allan Hutchison MacDonald was a man who was always approachable, was incredibly well read on a huge range of topics, was never overbearing, and had a never-ending fountain of patience. With the wife and daughter he had, he often needed that patience, too, I might add.

As a girl growing up, I felt my father knew just about everything, and, when I asked dad a question that he could not answer, he would always find out the answer. Dad loved his photography and his jazz, two areas that I also now enjoy as an adult. He also enjoyed a good discussion about what was going on in the politics of the day.

My father died when I was sixteen. It will always be my great regret that I did not get to have a conversation with dad as an adult, and that he will never be able to meet my fiancé, Brendan, or my sister-in-law, Tania. Further, I regret that he will never know his grandson, Jacob, or any children that I am fortunate enough to have. However, I am sure that he is here in spirit with me today; so, dad, I hope that I have made you proud and that I will continue to do so.

There were many steps that led me to where I am today. I was involved with both the student representative council at teachers college and then the University of Sydney union. My thanks go to my good friends Patrick Low and Tony Burke, who had many conversations with me in which I asked many questions about the way the Labor Party operated. They both showed me that the Labor Party had the underlying principles that I believe in.

After deciding that I did not want to be a teacher or a social worker, I ended up working in the union movement, first for the New South Wales Professional Officers Association and then for the Australian Services Union. I enjoyed my time at the POA and, as well as teaching me about representation of members, it showed me that industrial equity and advocacy are needed in white-collar management areas as much as any blue-collar worker will ever need them. I would like to thank Athol Cairn, Terry Hannan and Rosslyn Small for all that they taught me while I was at the POA.

It was my job with the ASU that brought me to Canberra, but it was a choice that I made gladly and have never regretted. In my five years working for the ASU, I met some truly wonderful people, among both the union members and the managers with whom I worked. I would like to thank Christine Tutty, who is here today in the gallery, for taking me under her wing when I first arrived and throughout the job. I am glad that she is here today to hear this speech and to see Labor in government.

Running in any election is hard work, and elections are never won by one person alone. This is not the first election in which I have been involved, but it is the first one in which I have been the candidate—not counting the university elections. There are many people who helped me to get to this point. My thanks first go to the people of Brindabella for putting their faith in me. My election is a responsibility that I do not take lightly, and I hope to represent you well in the next three years.

I would also like to give a huge vote of thanks to Michael Kerrisk for running an extremely professional and focused election campaign. The ACT branch of the Labor Party has come a long way forward since the 1998 election.

As I have already said, there were many people who have contributed to the campaign, but there are a few people whom I particularly want to thank. I wish to thank Annette Ellis, member of the House of Representatives, for her support during the campaign and since; Steve Whan and Tom Mavec, who are also in the gallery, for acting as sounding boards and for providing continuing support throughout the campaign; and Peter Jean, my campaign manager, for listening calmly to my rantings at various times. I also want to thank Kel Watt for his support and advice, and I am glad to have him on board to work in the office now.

I would like to thank particularly the former Hon. Johnno Johnson. Now that Johnno has retired from the New South Wales Legislative Council, he refuses to keep the title. Besides which, you always had to refer to him as Johnno anyway, otherwise you got into huge trouble.

Johnno was kind enough to come to Canberra for a fundraising dinner for me, in honour of his retirement from parliament. For those of you who don't know Johnno, he has always been a mentor to young people of all political persuasions, but particularly to young Labor Party supporters. He is also renowned throughout the party for having made the words "raffle" and "ALP" synonymous. Upon his retirement from the upper house, there were 27 pages of tribute speeches made to him from all sides of the house.

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Helen Cooney, who is now working for me in a paid capacity, did so much during the campaign, from fundraising to letterboxing, and generally telling me where I was supposed to be at what time, which she is continuing to do now. Helen, yes, you were annoying at times, but always very useful.

I am very happy that my good friend, Trish McAloon—I am not sure that she has arrived, but she was planning to be here—was able to come down for today's sitting or will be arriving for today's sitting. Trish is a true friend, having taken time to come down from Sydney for several weekends during the campaign, and then for the final week. I hope that my getting elected is a good repayment for all her hard work.

To my closest friend, Jane Wannell, who is not here today: thank you for providing emotional support to me for the last 20 years. You are the sister I never had and have pulled me out of more emotional turmoil than I care to remember.

This speech would not be complete without acknowledging my wonderful fiancé, Brendan Scott. You have been my strength throughout this time. I know for sure that I would not have made it through the campaign without you. I love you very much, and I am looking forward to getting married on 6 April 2002.

In conclusion, I hope that, when my time comes to depart this place, all will look back upon my time here and feel that I have served the people of Canberra well and that I have made a contribution to many people's lives.

MS DUNDAS: I ask for leave of the Assembly to make my inaugural speech.

Leave granted.

MS DUNDAS: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I rise today to make what was once known as a maiden speech, and I make it as the youngest woman ever elected to an Australian parliament and as the first member of the Australian Democrats to enter this ACT Assembly since self-government. I acknowledge and thank my fellow MLAs and also recognise my federal Democrat colleagues who are able to be here today.

The first elected Australian Democrat senators were taking their seats in the federal parliament in the same month that I was born. In the intervening 23 years I have grown into a community activist, a feminist and a politician, and my party of choice has also grown and changed politics.

I am very proud to be a member of a party where my vote has the same value as that of any member, where my voice can and will be heard, whether or not I can afford the time to attend meetings, and which has among its ranks a growing number of firsts. It has the first gay activist elected to federal parliament, the first female leader, a feat that we repeated, and the first indigenous Australian as part of the federal leadership team, to name but a few.

Nor have our representatives stepped back from being the first to bring issues to the nation's attention. When it was formed, the Australian Democrats were the only party committed to making Australia nuclear free, and we remain committed to human rights,

the environment and accountability, ideas and ideals that I intend to bring to this house of parliament.

It seems that, because I am a younger person and a woman, people are always interested in hearing about what brought me to politics—the juxtaposition of “young”, “woman” and “politics” often throws and confuses people.

I for one do not think it at all strange to have opinions, ideas and political notions at any age, but perhaps that is because I am privileged to be outspoken and to work with a whole range of outspoken people. And I do say “privileged”, because we can easily become complacent about our freedoms. It is humbling to think that for every protest that I have attended and for every vote that I have cast, I have done these things without threat to my life, unlike so many around the world today.

It would be remiss of us on this day, three months after those tragic events of 11 September 2001, if we did not reflect on the impact that one event can have. Senator Stott Despoja, in her first speech, mentioned the tragedy that happened at Port Arthur. She said then:

We must ensure that any legislative powers we have and all our wisdom and will are used to prevent another such massacre.

In this new world, we now have a new challenge.

In what are troubled times, there has been a lot of discussion about who or what are our enemies. I strongly believe that our enemies are racism, bigotry, sexism, ignorance and lack of compassion. Our weapons for battle should be education, empowerment, access and advocacy. We must cherish, respect and nurture our freedoms and continually recognise them, so that we may never lose them.

Since October, my life has changed drastically: I now have to think every day about how I will look and what I will say when the television cameras are in front of my face, and I have also discovered again just how wide and varied the ACT community is. In particular, I am continually impressed by the number of people out there working as volunteers, with little consideration or recognition. They are such an important part of this community that we would be unable to function if they stopped.

However, many things in my life have stayed the same: my commitment to feminism and to the rights of young people, and my impatience with injustice. I do believe in a woman’s right to choose. I also believe that drug use is a health issue and not a criminal one.

I find it quite amazing that some of the debates still facing this Assembly are around at all, and I know that I will be dismayed by some of the debates that we will have. The year is 2001, we are standing in a democratically elected parliament representing members of a notionally free society, and yet we still treat women seeking a medical procedure like criminals. We also marginalise people in our community with addictions because we refuse to understand or accept them.

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I am 23. I do not own a pair of Nikes. I do not attack old ladies. I crave to be understood and respected, as opposed to being dismissed out of hand or ignored. My views and my voice are important, and I have the power and ability to say this.

There are many more young people who feel the same but who are ignored, who are dismissed. We must recognise that young people are not just the future—we are part of the now. Young people use buses, young people walk through our town centres, young people are part of this community. What we think and what we feel are the results of our experience, just as valid and worthy as everyone else's. I hope that I can use my time in this Assembly to remind people of this fact, until it becomes innate.

A commissioner for children and young people could help in this struggle, and I hope that this Assembly will recognise the benefit of such a commission and work with me and young people through the community to make this a reality.

Now I would like to move on to the self-indulgent bit. When people complete theses, they are told to keep the thank yous short. As this is not a thesis, I am afraid I am going to take a little bit longer. There are an almost infinite number of people who have helped shape me into the person I am today, and I am sure that countless more will help me in my continuing path. I would like to briefly single out a few for thanks.

Thanks to the teachers of the ACT public school system, in particular, Mr Rugendyke—and no, it is a different one—Mrs Broom and Ian Foster, who are passionate teachers, all of chemistry, surprisingly. I am proud to say that I am a product of the ACT public school system, and my teachers are a big part of that. I would also like to add my thanks to the patient academics at ANU, and I hope that I have not worn out my welcome with them.

I would also like to mention the teachers who taught me how to dance. They taught me not just about dance but about myself and my capabilities: thanks to Jill, Michelle, Nicole and Melissa.

Thanks also go to the ANU Democrats on campus, specifically James and Melissa, for enticing me into a political club by using pizza. I thank also some of the political and journalistic types that I have met through my time at the ANU students association: Katie, Brendan, Michael, Daniel, Jason, Harry, Helen and Russell. We did not always get along, but from you all, in different ways, I have learned the reality of politics.

As an attempt to get them fired by mentioning them in a Democrat speech, I would like to thank Scott Ryan, John Snaden, Scott Pearce and Andrew Bell for constantly reminding me that people do have differing views and opinions and that the ability to express these articulately does not make them right.

I also thank my new staff, Merri and Llewellyn, who I hope will keep me sane through this week, and those who have had the faith to hire and guide me, Michelle Beg and Jenness Gardner.

Now on to my party: thanks to all of the ACT campaign team and candidates, particularly Charlie, Lynne, Russell, Anthony, Peta and Sylvia. We, as a team, have finally made it into this Assembly and we are not going anywhere. I would also like to

add my thanks to the national campaign team, including Mathew Baird, Jack Evans, Sam Hudson and Alison Rogers.

To the national network of the Young Australian Democrats and DoCs, especially Rachael, Haroon, Andrew, Lisa, Stuart, Adam, and our fairy godmother, Yulia: thanks for truly embodying what it is to be a Democrat.

A big warm thank you to my friends who, like Gretel and Miriam, have been with me since the beginning; or Jackie, Peta and Becky, whose deep friendship and caring will never leave me. To James and Jono: thanks for the laughs. To my friend David: thanks for keeping me real—I say this in the hope that, if I thank him now, I will get a thank you when he finally publishes his novel.

Finally, I move to my family. I thank my grandmothers, Joyce and Broni, for each being inspirational, in their own way, despite the struggles that they have had, and for the children that they have raised. To my parents, Ian and Edna: thank you for always encouraging and supporting me to be whom I want to be; and to my big brother, Allan: thanks for teaching me how to fight back.

To my urban family, Jason, Erica and Amanda, all of whom could have been mentioned many times over in these thank yous: thank you for the arguments over the gas bill, thank you for the encouragement throughout the many campaigns that I have run and for recognising my good ideas, and the really bad ones. Thank you, also, for allowing me to be myself.

I am very humbled and proud to be here, to be part of this history. I hope that I can serve the people of Ginninderra and the ACT well, and that we can work together to take Canberra forward, now and in the future.

In 1978, Senator Mason, one of those first Democrat senators, noted that “there is a widespread public disillusionment with our parliaments”. He believed that it was due to “the increasing domination of parliamentary business by the politics of confrontation, failure to deal with the real problems of this country and a preoccupation with purely political matters”. Senator Mason then went on to add, “The malaise in our society is very deep rooted. It will not be remedied by trivial bandaiding but only by a conscious and determined move towards a better form of democracy.”

Twenty-three years later, these words still ring true. With this Assembly, and through my career in politics, I will try to make democracy better, so that this public disillusionment will be arrested. I just hope it does not take another 23 years. Thank you.

MRS DUNNE: Mr Speaker, I ask for leave to deliver my inaugural speech.

Leave granted

MRS DUNNE: On the Pacific Highway, just south of Woodburn, there is a simple stone memorial flanked by the flags of Italy and Australia. This is the site where in 1881 a score of Italian families made a new life on land given them by Henry Parkes. They called it “New Italy”.

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These were intrepid people, like Tennyson's Ulysses, fired with an heroic and questing spirit, determined "to strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield". Destitute at the time of Italian unification, and unwaveringly inspired to seek a better life, they walked from Treviso, in the northern Veneto, all the way to Barcelona, to set sail for the South Seas. But their adventure went tragically wrong. Their settlement in New Ireland turned out to be a place of chaos, hunger and disease. They fled to Noumea, from where Henry Parkes brought them to Sydney and finally to New Italy. Their arrival was the final chapter in what has been known as "the ill-fated Marquis de Rae expedition", and it opened a new chapter in the history of the northern rivers of New South Wales.

The new arrivals raised cattle and felled timber, like their neighbours; but, unlike them, they also made wine, and prize-winning silk. They fitted into their new country, answering the call and sending their sons to theatres of war. Their descendants have been farmers and war heroes, stock and station agents, teachers and tick inspectors, doctors, journalists and politicians. One of that intrepid band was my great grandfather, Michael Scarrabelotti.

Growing up, I was always fiercely proud of the New Italy settlers, of their journey and their role in our community. It was always something special, a little different—and a distinction that wasn't easy to forget with a name like Scarrabelotti!

From these people, and from their example, I have drawn many things:

- a respect for tradition, coupled with the recognition that on occasions circumstances may necessitate decisive, radical action;
- an understanding of the importance of order in society and the knowledge that governments are not the source of all wisdom;
- a belief in the value of hard work, balanced with an awareness of the importance of celebrating its rewards;
- an affinity with the land, and the deep respect that comes with the knowledge that we pass it on as a legacy to our children;
- a commitment to the importance of families, but not to the exclusion of engagement with, and service to, the wider Australian community;
- a sense of duty to make society the best we can; and
- a religion that teaches that we build in this world no abiding city, and that perfection is not attainable in this life.

I belong to an Australian Catholic tradition which is uncomfortable speaking publicly about religion: it feels a bit too much like the hypocrites praying on street corners. Yet I have to acknowledge my faith as the source—though not the only possible source—of the values I bring with me. The journey that has brought me to this place has been strongly influenced by the history and tenacity of these people and their descendants.

Standing here today, and with this story in mind, I am conscious of my responsibility to the people of Ginninderra who elected me, to the people of the ACT and to the wider Australian community of which we are all inextricably a part.

I come here well aware that elected politicians are seldom held in the highest of esteem. Too often, they are seen as either beholden to a narrow interest or sectoral group or so amorphous as to exhibit no belief in anything greater than mere political survival.

I am indebted to that great contemporary figure, Vaclav Havel, the dissident writer who courageously defied the communist dictatorship in Czechoslovakia, led the “Velvet Revolution”, and who went on to become the Czech president. Havel, writing about his native land, whose rich cultural traditions and heritage had been so diminished by the generation of brutalisation, reminds us that in politics, as in life, there is more at stake than the exigencies of the moment.

Alone among the leaders of post-communist Europe, he articulated the message that reconstruction was not simply a matter of rebuilding an economy: it was of re-establishing a climate of trust, of civic virtue and of public morality. Political life, he has taught me, has a moral dimension, a higher responsibility. Without that it amounts to nothing.

Havel, as a great exemplar of morality in public life, has written that this recognition of a higher responsibility grows out of our certainty that death ends nothing, because everything is forever being recorded and evaluated somewhere else. He has spelled out a credo that I am happy to adopt as my own. He writes:

Genuine politics is simply a matter of serving those around us—serving the community, and serving those who will come after us.

If we are to redeem public life in the eyes of those we purport to serve, we must recognise this duty of service, not only in what we do but in the way we do it. It is my fond hope that this Fifth Assembly of the ACT will in its deliberations and actions enhance, not diminish, the civic life of our community.

Mr Speaker, most people know that I am the mother of five splendid children who are the centrepiece of my life. I come into this place with an abiding belief in the primacy of the family in our society, and the pressing need to elevate the idea of family, to make it a prism through which policy can be viewed and evaluated.

It is a matter of some concern to me that in some quarters of public life the family has become just another interest group to be listened to or not listened to; to have its arguments and values weighed against contending arguments and values in the debate on social policy. As long as I am here, I will work to ensure that the family is at the centre and not the periphery of the political process.

Although a newcomer to this Assembly, I have been involved in politics in the ACT for some years, and I am privileged to have played a role in a couple of milestones in the ACT. I am particularly proud of my involvement in the Hare-Clark campaign committee, which oversaw the electoral referendum. In 1992, Canberrans decisively rejected the idea

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of elections decided by party machines awarding safe seats to favoured candidates and agreed instead to introduce the fairest electoral system in the world.

It was an inspiring example of what can be achieved by cooperation across political boundaries, and that is the only way that anything can be achieved in this Assembly. Some consider it a frustration; I esteem it as a safeguard in a system with few of the usual checks and balances of the Westminster system.

Another milestone was the ACT becoming part of the Murray-Darling Basin Commission. I am particularly proud of the role I played in negotiations. I believe passionately that, as inhabitants of one of the most arid countries in the world, we must do our part to protect and enhance our most precious natural resource. As Australia's largest inland city and the largest city inside the basin, a great responsibility rests on us. We must be careful custodians of our water, but, more than that, we must be prepared to lead the way in innovative water policy.

Along the way, I have acquired a label or two. A former distinguished member, and a minister in this place, once referred to me as a "dangerous conservative". If my belief in institutions makes me conservative, then I am proud to wear the label. And if standing in the way of change for its own sake without thought of the consequences makes me dangerous, then I am determinedly dangerous.

Our last century is too tragically littered with the victims of social planning in societies as far apart as Germany, Russia and Cambodia. I share Edmund Burke's regard for the organic nature of society, and take careful heed of his words:

... it is with infinite caution that any man ought to venture upon pulling down an edifice which has answered in any tolerable degree for ages the common purposes of society, or on building it up again, without having models and patterns of approved utility before his eyes.

Yet even Burke, speaking about pre-revolutionary France, made the wise observation that a state without the means of some change is without the means of its conservation.

I stand before you today as a proud representative of the Liberal Party of the ACT, but I would label myself as a Liberal of the Hayek school. I do not see liberalism as the middle way between radicalism and conservatism. I do not support the status quo simply because "we've always done it that way", but I will support the institutions and conventions that underpin our stability and cohesion and make us what we are.

As a child of the Cold War, however, and a student of history, I have the deepest suspicion of any ideology that purports to provide ready-made answers to all the political questions of the day. None of us has a monopoly on political or social wisdom. While I expect to disagree on many occasions with my fellow members, I hope that I shall always respect their views, the belief in those views that brought them to seek election, and the endorsement of the community that made those aspirations a reality.

Nor do I believe that all wisdom resides in this Assembly, despite the range of views represented. Politicians, especially in the ACT, are necessarily people who know a little about a wide range of topics, and I am humbled by the knowledge that anything I say in

this chamber will almost certainly be heard by people who know far more about the subject than I do.

I hope that I will always remain open to ideas from the wider community. In particular, I will continue to work to implement the longstanding Liberal Party policy of citizen-initiated referenda. It is a matter of political faith to me that the ACT community can be certain that its views are reflected in legislation as a matter of right, not of privilege.

Mr Speaker, my standing in this place today is the result of an extremely potent mix of circumstances and influences. The descendant of those Italian immigrants from northern New South Wales does not get to the ACT Legislative Assembly on her own. An occasion like this cannot pass without paying testament to the people who have brought me this far. The Presentation Sisters and the Marist Brothers in Lismore taught me and gave me a thirst for knowledge. My parents, Frank and Lorna Scarrabelotti, nurtured me, instilled in me a thirst for justice and educated me in the faith. My brother, Gary, helped me further that education and is always there.

The person I most admire in this place, Gary Humphries, demonstrates every day that in politics, as in all other things, substance and integrity are what matters. I also mention my friend Rohan Greenland, who always makes politics fun. I could not be here today if it were not for these people, but that is only the half of it.

Nothing would be possible without my friend, my soul mate, my love, Lyle Dunne. Lyle's wit and wisdom, his patience and poetry, have enriched me for half my life. Lyle and our splendid children, Olivia, Thomas, Julia, Isabella and Conor are an entirely unmerited gift and the depth of my pride in them is truly immeasurable. Mere words of thanks seem hopelessly inadequate.

Mr Speaker, the best way I can thank these people and the thousands of electors, whom I do not know personally yet but who put their faith in me, is by dedicating myself to their service with an unflinching determination that the small part I will play in the history of this city and the lives of those who cherish it as their home will be to their ultimate and demonstrable benefit.

MS GALLAGHER: Mr Speaker, I ask for leave of the Assembly to make my inaugural speech.

Leave granted.

MS GALLAGHER: I thank the Assembly for the opportunity to speak today and I congratulate you, Mr Speaker, on your appointment as Speaker of the Fifth ACT Assembly. To begin with, I would like to thank all the people who helped me get here today. Without their help, encouragement, ideas and enthusiasm, I would not have succeeded in what I set out to do some 12 months ago.

My mum, Betsy, deserves individual recognition, not only for the support she gives me but also for the never-ending commitment she provides to my daughter, Abigail. Recognition also needs to be given to my family: Clare, Terry, Matthew, Richard, Imogen and Amber, who always support Abby and me and will hopefully continue to do so; to Tim Gatrell and Michael Samaras, whose vision and strategic planning sent me on

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my way; to Margaret Gillespie, Katie Borman and Angie Drake, who took that vision and put it on paper and into action; to Sarah Schoonwater, Paul Ingwersen, Justin Larkin and Celia Pollard, who believed in me and persuaded me to put my hand up.

To the ACT ALP, Michael Kerrisk, the campaign director: congratulations on achieving what you set out to do at the beginning of the campaign. To Young Labor Left and all the campaign workers: thank you for your hours of commitment and hard work. To the other Labor candidates who were not successful this time: thank you for your work, which in the end assisted in electing me ahead of themselves. To the voters in Molonglo and the people I met on the campaign trail: thank you for giving me this opportunity to represent you.

I would also like to record my appreciation for the tremendous work and support given to all Labor women candidates by Emily's List, an organisation formed to support progressive Labor women to get elected to Australian parliaments. Formed in 1996, to date Emily's List has supported 60 new women to get elected to parliaments around Australia.

To Amy, Nick and Angie: thank you for agreeing to embark on this journey with me. I would also like to acknowledge the excellent support provided to the new members from the Legislative Assembly staff since our election last month.

Finally, recognition needs to be given to two people who are so important to me, but who regrettably have passed away in recent years. To my dad: thank you for encouraging me in whatever I chose to do and whatever path I took to get there. Even though you have gone, I continue to look for your guidance wherever I go.

To Brett Seaman, who ignited my desire for activist politics, who encouraged me and who taught me to dare to challenge, dream and fight: with you I share my greatest asset and love—our daughter, Abigail. Mr Speaker, I dedicate this speech to their memory.

Mr Speaker, the tasks before a new member of the Assembly are large and varied. We must be responsive to the communities we come from and we must also lead those community debates that have broader repercussions. We must always do this in the interests of democratic accountability and fairness for all.

I have been elected as a member for Molonglo, representing the Australian Labor Party. I have lived in the electorate all my life. I completed my education here and I am now raising my own family here. I went to Duffy Primary School, Melrose High and Stirling College before completing my education with a Bachelor of Arts at ANU. Having lived here for 31 years, I feel that I have learnt a great deal about my local environment and I know that this local knowledge will assist me greatly in my new role as a member of the Legislative Assembly.

I share the concerns of all Canberrans for our community. Accessible health care, quality public education and training for our children and encouraging job opportunities must be a priority for any ACT government. We must also be careful to monitor how our city develops. Urban planning and the incorporation of development with both natural and social environments are pressing issues for my electorate. A Labor government can address these issues. The ACT community has endorsed our policies and by doing so has

given ACT Labor the opportunity to deliver on them. It is an honour to be a part of that government.

Mr Speaker, much has been made of the election of five new women to this Assembly. The 2001 ACT election result delivered a 200 per cent increase in the female representation. I am proud to be a part of an Assembly that is more representative of the community, although much more could be done here.

However, I am not just here because I am a woman. I am here because I wanted to represent my community and because I believe strongly in the right of every person to be represented, be it at the workplace, in the community or in this Assembly. I have been a student, a worker and a unionist. I am a woman and a parent and now I am a member of this Assembly and, as such, it is incumbent upon me to represent all the people of my electorate to the best of my ability. It is my sincere hope that at the end of this Assembly the people of Molonglo can say that they are proud to have had me as one of their representatives.

Mr Speaker, my employment background has been in the community sector and the labour movement. The 13 years I have spent working in these fields has given me first-hand experience and contact with those members of our community who are less fortunate than I and who rely on the advocacy skill of others to represent them and argue in their interests.

My years in the community sector and the labour movement have shown me that both these fields are alike in many ways. In recent times we have seen these groups coming together locally, nationally and internationally to resist regressive political agenda and to work together as a force for positive social change.

Australia has a long and impressive industrial relations history. Since the first convicts strike in 1791 to the more recent industrial battles, Australian families have relied on the organising efforts of Australian unions. Today, the Australian labour movement is representing millions of working people, be it through individual support or through broader campaigns run by the ACTU—campaigns for living wage increases, paid maternity leave, unpaid parental leave, reasonable hours cases, winning superannuation for all, securing employee entitlements when companies go broke; the list goes on. It would be difficult for any working person in this country, or their family, to argue that the work of the Australian labour movement has not in some way benefited them.

When we talk about the labour movement, we are actually talking about issues and ideas which touch every member of the community. That is because work, fair recognition and remuneration for that work are part of everyone's life. It is also because the labour movement is the community. A fair go for all is at the heart of every community and is championed in the everyday issues addressed and programs run by the labour movement. This involvement keeps us vibrant and gives us strength. It is also a source of our renewal—a renewal of ideas and a renewal of our purpose. To those who seek to undermine the community I come from and the unions it built, the challenge is for you to demonstrate how the labour movement lets down ordinary Australians. I think your task is far more difficult than mine.

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Let us also acknowledge the role of the union movement in standing up for due process and humanity in the current debate over asylum seekers coming to our country. These issues are fundamental to how the community views itself and ultimately views us as its elected representatives. I am proud to be a part of a Labor government that values the work of the labour movement, not just in securing rights for working families but also in its involvement in the broader community.

Mr Speaker, I would also like to acknowledge the valuable and often unrecognised work performed by the many community groups that help make Canberra an accessible, healthy and interesting city. There are hundreds of community groups in Canberra, many of which operate on minimal funding or by generous donation. The services provided by these organisations are absolutely vital to the Canberra community. These groups advocate, support and provide services to the many local people who require these services to enable them to access our community. They provide information and education on a myriad of issues to a broad range of people. They provide sporting and cultural activities to all Canberrans and they foster links of friendship and tolerance between this territory and a multitude of nations and cultures around the globe.

The services provided by these organisations are not only necessary, they are indispensable. It is often the work of community groups that enable the marginalised in our society to enjoy their basic human rights and it is these services that ensure that thousands of Canberrans can take an active part in our society, culture and community.

Mr Speaker, community organisations have been adversely affected by years of federal and local Liberal government. The GST, competitive tendering, unrestricted competition policy and purchaser/provider arrangements have pitted community group against community group as they compete for the ever-shrinking government dollar. A strong and well-resourced community sector is achieved by funding quality programs to be delivered by organisations that have the skills and expertise to do so.

Recognising and valuing the work of the not-for-profit sector involves more than token gestures of appreciation handed out to a few individuals. It involves a genuine recognition of the power of the collective work of these organisations to make life better for thousands of people across Canberra. Such recognition should include real support, both financial and structural.

I have been elected as a representative of the Australian Labor Party and it is part of my job to ensure that the core principles of Labor—fairness, justice and equality—which are held deeply in the community are recognised by government, given force and implemented as policy. Let us clearly identify the obstacles to a just society and formulate the policy to remove them so that we can deliver to Canberra the society it deserves.

This Assembly must recognise that no policy is neutral, that it has repercussions for many groups within our community and as such it should be the duty of this Assembly to consider the needs of the entire community when it passes laws for Canberra.

The great British Labour politician, Tony Benn, is said to repeat to himself these wise words whenever he meets someone with power: “What power have you got? Where did you get it from? In whose interest do you exercise it? To whom are you accountable?”

How do we get rid of you?” This applies as much to the people we encounter in this job as it does to ourselves. I hope my constituents repeat this when meeting me and check my progress in the spirit of accountability. I also hope to inspire in the people of Molonglo the confidence that I will use this position not only to represent but empower them.

Mr Speaker, we are charged with a difficult task at a difficult time—to provide leadership and support to the people of Canberra at a time of international and local uncertainty. At such a time it is easy to allow our fears and prejudices to direct our actions. It is easy to accuse and blame others while ignoring our responsibilities to care for and support each other.

Already we have seen in this country issues of refugees and terrorism severely challenge the Australian ideal of a fair go for all. Recent events have tainted Australia’s reputation for generosity and openness with fear and suspicion. This is not the Australia I want for my family.

Canberrans should feel secure enough in themselves and in their knowledge that their government hears and acts on their concerns to act generously and calmly in times of crisis. It is the task of this Assembly to provide that security. We should work together with the community to reach those people who may feel dispossessed or marginalised. I take it as my personal task to heed their concerns, to discuss with them their issues and to represent their interests in a progressive and generous Assembly. I hope the members here today will also make this their goal. Thank you.

MRS CROSS: I ask for leave of the Assembly to make my inaugural speech.

Leave granted.

MRS CROSS: On the matter of politicians’ speeches, a wag once said that “a politician who sticks to the facts has no respect for tradition”. I guess that leaves me with no option, Mr Speaker, but to break with this alleged tradition and stick to the facts.

I am honoured to be given this opportunity to speak for the first time in our Legislative Assembly, and with this opportunity comes responsibility. I want to say to all who voted for me: I will not forget my responsibility to you. I am proud to represent the people of Molonglo, I am proud of our wonderful city, and I will represent all Canberrans to the best of my ability.

Mr Speaker, I believe the people of Canberra will find the Liberal opposition far more diligent and hard working than those we have replaced. For me, this is an opportunity to be proactive, rather than merely opposing the government of the day for the sake of doing so—even when that meant occasionally opposing their own policies.

As a newcomer to public life, I am aware of my limitations when it comes to the complexities that will confront us in this chamber during the years ahead. I do not claim to be the well of all wisdom, but my life experience has taught me one thing—the importance of team play. One thing I can pledge is that I will listen and read and use whatever abilities I have to ensure this parliament makes sensible decisions and performs in a respectful manner.

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Mr Speaker, the word “represent” brings with it a meaning as narrow, or as broad, as each of us may individually wish to give it. Yet I am sure that the voters of Canberra would want it taken at its most generous, and for that reason I am thrilled to be part of this Assembly—an Assembly, more than those that have gone before, with the greatest potential to represent not only the interests of this unique city but also its values and character. For instance, through the election of six women to this place—up from two in the previous Assembly—we can now better reflect the aspirations of our entire community, male and female alike.

I sought office here to bring to this place a new and important perspective in relation to many of the vital issues that affect, or will affect, the happiness and the prosperity of all Canberrans. For instance, at a time when the world’s peace is under threat from those animated by envy, hatred and intolerance, I am proud to stand here as a product of Australia’s and Canberra’s unique brand of rich, harmonious multiculturalism. I was born in Australia of Greek parents and grew up here. I have also lived abroad in societies with political systems very different from our own form of democracy. One was of the far left, another of the far right. But they differed little in their fundamentals. These experiences broadened my perspectives and reinforced and deepened my appreciation of the society we are so fortunate to live in.

During my time in the Assembly I will champion the values of tolerance and acceptance of all, regardless of race or religion or background—values which I believe are held by the vast majority of Canberra citizens. I will work with the local multicultural community to help ensure the ACT remains one of the most culturally diverse and harmonious communities in Australia. I will use my skills in international marketing to encourage Canberra’s thriving business community to make the most of opportunities available in Asia and indeed throughout the world.

As president of the organisation Women in Information and Communication, a group of more than 150 like-minded women involved in the information communication technology sector, I will continue to encourage greater female participation in this vibrant area of innovation and growth among Canberra’s industries, and I wish to pay tribute to the women who have paved the way.

I come to this place, Mr Speaker, with the perspective of Canberra’s small business community firmly in my mind. I have been closely involved with the community, most recently as president of the Phillip Traders Association. I know some of the frustrations small businesses face from time to time and I want to help lessen those frustrations.

To this end I have already had experience in representing issues to government. Small business is the engine room of the local economy. At its best, it represents initiative and creativity at their best. It embodies values we on this side embrace. Inept government can easily stifle this sector, and I will be ever vigilant in this regard.

I said earlier that one of the most important distinguishing features of this Assembly is the high proportion of female representation. Women attract unique responsibilities within modern society, and no parliamentary body can hope to successfully develop realistic policy positions if the perspective of half the population is not fully understood and respected.

I have balanced the often conflicting demands of home and career, and I look forward to joining with the other female MLAs in offering to Canberra a view of the world which encompasses the needs and aspirations of every one of our citizens.

I am a passionate woman. I am passionate about life, my career, my family and my friends. I am also passionate about my city, Canberra. I am passionate about its moods, the light, its breeziness, its air of freshness and purpose. But we must be vigilant about things that spark our passions.

Canberra has evolved through a fine balance of government planning and private initiative, and it is the latter that has brought new spark and life into a place that was once derided as a company town. We must be careful that the heavy hand of government does not return to stifle the place, and I am concerned that proposed changes to planning laws have the potential to turn back the clock.

Finally, one of the things that are constantly shown by the people of Canberra and Australia is the lack of respect the electorate has for parliament, let alone individual politicians. With so many of us being new here, with the new perspective we bring, blended with the experience of others within this chamber, I hope we can change that perception. I will certainly be committing myself to that end.

In closing, I would like to put on record my thanks to a number of people who worked tirelessly to help me reach this point, and without whom I would not be standing here. These people know who they are and are too modest to want their names mentioned, but there are a few I particularly want to thank: Mr David Kibbey, for his unstinting support and faith in me during the campaign; my campaign team of Peter Taylor, Matthew Beltran, Kate Prior, Marie Bampton, Helga Noakes, Kaye Cameron, Chris Stavridis and Gareth Ward; my dear friends the Capezios, the Beavers, the Tiirikainens, the Reddens; and my darling husband, David Cross, who has always displayed great leadership and courage while serving his country and who continues to inspire me to stay true to myself. Thank you.

I would also like to thank the Liberal Party for the confidence they have shown in me. In particular, I am honoured that the leader of our party, Mr Humphries, has entrusted me with portfolio responsibilities as a shadow minister. I congratulate him on the distinction of his term as Chief Minister, and the respect which he attracted so widely in our community for his clarity of judgment, his good sense and calm leadership. I will ensure I repay his trust with hard work, enthusiasm and loyalty.

I would also like to congratulate the new Chief Minister, Jon Stanhope. I am sure you will work hard for the people of Canberra during the next three years, but don't get too comfortable because we would like to have our offices on the second floor in 2004.

Thank you everyone for indulging me. I look forward to the next three years. Please don't mistake weepiness and tears for weakness. I find that it takes great strength to be able to show emotion. I would like to end my speech by paying tribute to my fellow colleagues Vicki Dunne and Steve Pratt, who were enormously supportive of me during my campaign and whom I am looking forward to working very closely with in the next three years. Thank you.

Standing committees—establishment

MR HARGREAVES (11.59): Mr Speaker, I ask for leave to move a motion to establish the general purpose standing committees of the Fifth Assembly.

Leave granted.

MR HARGREAVES: I move:

General Purpose Standing Committees

- (1) The following general purpose standing committees be established and each committee to inquire into and report on matters referred to it by the Assembly or matters that are considered by the committee to be of concern to the community:
 - (a) a Standing Committee on Public Accounts to:
 - (i) examine:
 - (A) the accounts of the receipts and expenditure of the Australian Capital Territory;
 - (B) the financial affairs of authorities of the Australian Capital Territory; and
 - (C) all reports of the Auditor-General which have been presented to the Assembly;
 - (ii) report to the Assembly, with such comments as it thinks fit, any items or matters in those accounts, statements and reports, or any circumstances connected with them, to which the Committee is of the opinion that the attention of the Assembly should be directed;
 - (iii) inquire into any question in connection with the public accounts which is referred to it by the Assembly and to report to the Assembly on that question and
 - (iv) examine matters relating to economic and business development, small business, tourism, market and regulatory reform, public sector management, taxation and revenue and sustainability;
 - (b) a Standing Committee on Education to examine matters related to early childhood education and care, primary, secondary, post secondary and tertiary education, non-government education, arts and culture, sport and recreation;
 - (c) a Standing Committee on Health to examine matters related to hospitals, community, public and mental health, health promotion and disease prevention, disability services, drug and substance abuse and targeted health programs;
 - (d) a Standing Committee on Legal Affairs to perform the duties of a scrutiny of bills and subordinate legislation committee and examine matters related to community and individual rights, consumer rights, courts, police and emergency services, corrections including a prison, governance and industrial relations, administrative law, civil liberties

- and human rights, censorship, company law, law and order, criminal law, consumer affairs and regulatory and regulatory services;
- (e) a Standing Committee on Community Services and Social Equity to examine municipal, family and youth services, services for older persons, housing, poverty, children at risk and multicultural and indigenous affairs;
 - (f) a Standing Committee on Planning and Environment to examine matters related to planning and land management, conservation and heritage, transport services and planning, environment and ecological sustainability.
- (2) The Standing Committee on Legal Affairs when performing the duties of a scrutiny of bills and subordinate legislation committee shall:
- (a) consider whether any instrument of a legislative nature made under an Act which is subject to disallowance and or disapproval by the Assembly (including a regulation, rule or by-law):
 - (i) is in accord with the general objects of the Act under which it is made;
 - (ii) unduly trespasses on rights previously established by law;
 - (iii) makes rights, liberties and/or obligations unduly dependent upon non-reviewable decisions; or
 - (iv) contains matter which in the opinion of the Committee should properly be dealt with in an Act of the Legislative Assembly;
 - (b) consider whether any explanatory statement or explanatory memorandum associated with legislation and any regulatory impact statement meets the technical or stylistic standards expected by the Committee;
 - (c) consider whether the clauses of bills introduced into the Assembly:
 - (i) unduly trespass on personal rights and liberties;
 - (ii) make rights, liberties and/or obligations unduly dependent upon insufficiently defined administrative powers;
 - (iii) make rights, liberties and/or obligations unduly dependent upon non-reviewable decision;
 - (iv) inappropriately delegate legislative powers; or
 - (v) insufficiently subject the exercise of legislative power to parliamentary scrutiny;
 - (d) report to the Assembly on these or any related matter and if the Assembly is not sitting when the Committee is ready to report on bills and subordinate legislation, the Committee may send its report to the Speaker, or, in the absence of the Speaker, to the Deputy Speaker, who is authorised to give directions for its printing, publication and circulation.
- (3) If the Assembly is not sitting when the Standing Committee on Planning and Environment has completed consideration of a report on draft plan variations referred pursuant to section 25 of the *Land (Planning and Environment) Act 1991* or draft plans of management referred pursuant to section 204 of the *Land (Planning Environment) Act 1991*, the Committee may send its report to the Speaker, or, in the absence of the Speaker, to the Deputy Speaker, who is authorised to give directions for its printing, publication and circulation.

- (4) Each committee shall consist of three members.
- (5) Each committee shall have power to consider and make use of the evidence and records of the relevant standing committee appointed during the previous Assembly.
- (6) Each committee be provided with necessary staff, facilities and resources.
- (7) The foregoing provisions of this resolution, so far as they are inconsistent with the standing orders, have effect notwithstanding anything contained in the standing orders.

I apologise to members for the lack of notice but I thought it was a bit inappropriate to start circulating the motion while the inaugural speeches were being made. I thank members for their indulgence.

The creation of standing committees in this form bears some explanation. In the Fourth Assembly the standing committee structure mirrored the ministries, and whilst this had some machinery advantages, it posed in our view some problems with the potential breach of the notion of the separation of powers. The advantages of that system were that it was easy for the machinery of government to operate. The standing committees mirrored not only the ministries but also the departmental structures, and thus the thinking and considerations of those committees were naturally directed to the activities of those departments.

An examples of that direction of thought is the notion of automatic consideration of annual reports. It is natural that if a committee mirrored the departments then consideration of the activities of a department on an annual basis would be appropriate. The same could be said of the referral of parts of the budget process to committees. The information provided to committees on budgetary matters was that of a list of initiatives and not a full budget for that particular department. Even so, considerations of the committee were limited to the bottom line of that particular department.

In essence therefore, the elected representatives of the people of the ACT were not allowed, through this referral process, to consider amounts or activities outside the parameters of the department or ministry. There was a real chance that the standing committees would become an extension of the executive.

It was the truth that in the last Assembly committees were given the responsibility of choosing between a number of deserving cases and being asked to decide on a priority of requests. It is the role of committees to recommend to the Assembly, not to be a decision-making body. The executive is charged with making decisions. The committees assist the Assembly, and if this assists the government of the day, the coincidence is fortuitous.

The Standing Committee on Justice and Community Safety, with which I am most familiar, was credited by the last government as choosing a site for the prison. The committee, in fact, recommended a choice of two, from a selection, and the government did the choosing. The temptation for this to recur is exacerbated when the committees mirror departments.

The notion of separation of powers dictates that elected representatives should be separate from the executive and free to roam across programs and activities to consider areas of community concern and make recommendations to the Assembly accordingly.

The structure proposed here today follows broad policy lines and thrusts. It puts policy issues into six groups under general headings. The standing committee structure is for a Standing Committee on Administration and Procedure, as dictated by standing orders, and six policy committees. These standing committees are Public Accounts, Education, Health, Legal Affairs, Community Services and Social Equity, and Planning and Environment.

The motion circulated in my name indicates most of the detailed policy thrusts to be addressed by the committees, but there may be areas of crossover which, through their emphasis, may fall into one committee or the other.

The general thrust of the PAC is that of financial and economic accountability. That of Education is clearly the education of young people and adults, with a further accent on arts, culture and sport and recreation.

The Health Committee has the task of looking into issues concerning the range of health matters facing the people of the ACT. This will include not only the major issues of hospitals, community and preventative medicine but also public health and substance abuse. It will also look at targeted health programs such as issues for women, younger and older people.

The Legal Affairs Committee will look into the range of community safety issues covered by the former Justice and Community Safety Standing Committee, but will also have carriage of governance and electoral issues and industrial relations. Industrial relations are included in this committee because industrial relations are about the fundamental rights of employees and employers alike.

The committee will also have responsibility for scrutiny of bills and subordinate legislation in respect of recommendations to the Assembly over possible infringements of personal rights and liberties. It would be preferable for this committee to be one in its own right, but regard must be taken of the workload of both members of this Assembly and that of the Committee Office.

The Community Services and Social Equity Standing Committee will have carriage of a wide range of community issues centred around the quality of life and equity of access for significant groups within our community, and will address such burning issues as poverty in our community and children at risk of not making it in our society.

The Planning and Environment Standing Committee will have the responsibilities of looking at planning issues, land management, conservation and heritage, transport and the environment, all in the context of ecological sustainability.

Sustainability and the triple bottom line are issues which have become more apparent in recent times and consideration of these issues must be threaded through all committees.

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I recommend that the Assembly accept the construction of standing committees in the forms proposed. May I extend my appreciation to those involved in the consultation process in the development of the structures. There was a genuine attempt to create structures which met the expectations of all involved, and I thank all of you. I commend the structures to the Assembly.

MR HUMPHRIES (Leader of the Opposition) (12.05): Mr Speaker, I want to indicate that the opposition will support the motion that has been moved by Mr Hargreaves. It is a motion which provides for an appropriate structure of Assembly committees. It provides members with avenues and a chance to be able to pursue a range of matters which are obviously important to the work of this place and to our constituents.

It is clear that this exercise in structuring committees is a matter of some ongoing debate in this place. Mr Hargreaves has spoken to the reasons why this structure is to be preferred to previous structures. Although, as I said, the Liberal Party does not oppose this motion, I do defend in my remarks today the structure which was previously used, where portfolio committees shadowed, as it were, the ministers concerned. I think it is important that we be able to not only hold ministers accountable in particular areas for particular activities, but that we hold them in general accountable for the way that they conduct their portfolios across the board.

Mr Speaker, under this structure ministers in all cases will be reporting to a number of committees. The subject matter might be united in respect of those committees, but the coherence of ministers appearing before committees might not be a matter that we can take for granted. That is, each committee will be dealing with a number of ministers and the opportunity to therefore focus on a particular minister over a period of time is, to some extent, diminished.

For example, I know that there is no committee expressly tasked with the exercise of shadowing the Chief Minister in his day-to-day performance of the operation of the government.

Mr Quinlan: We do that.

MR HUMPHRIES: You do that. Well I am pleased to see someone is going to do it. I can assure Mr Quinlan and Mr Wood that we will be doing it as well.

Perhaps having the Chief Minister report to the Health Committee as Minister for Health, the Legal Affairs Committee as Attorney-General, and other committees in respect of other matters within his purview, may keep him on his toes with respect to each of those matters individually but this may not perhaps keep a focus on his overall performance as Chief Minister. I suspect that there will be occasions when we will be wondering with the committee structure in general how exactly we can hold a particular minister to account. However, Mr Speaker, I do not think this is a serious a problem. It is a reflection of an earlier decision made in earlier assemblies to structure committees in this way, and I think it is sustainable.

I mentioned in my remarks on the first sitting day in November that there was, in the view of the opposition, a need for us to greatly enhance and improve the work of the standing committees of this place. The Liberal Party has put on record its concern that

the committees had become indulgent and lazy and, indeed, had failed to focus on their task appropriately in the Fourth Assembly. It is our determination to make sure that that process is reversed in the Fifth Assembly. The Liberal members who serve on those committees will work diligently to ensure that the work of those committees is addressed appropriately.

Mr Speaker, I understand that members will be nominating to these committees. There is in fact a provision in the motion to provide for nomination and I am sure the standing orders cover this. I look forward to the formation of the committees. The Liberal Party later on this week will have some motions to move regarding early references to those committees which we hope members of this place will support. I support the motion.

MS TUCKER (12.09): I will speak briefly to the motion. I also support this structure of the committees. Obviously no one model is going to be perfect in terms of how we arrange the responsibilities of committees. The points Mr Humphries made about shadowing ministers are fair enough. But the obvious benefit of this kind of arrangement is that you can challenge the often very fragmented work of government in terms of the fact that individual portfolio areas or departments work in isolation from each other.

The committee work that I have been involved in, particularly in the social area, has shown me quite clearly that it is extremely difficult for governments to take an intersectoral approach to issues. Departments have a difficulty in coordinating their work and working with each other in the way that is obviously necessary, and we often see people falling through gaps in the community as a result of this fragmentation of the work of government.

As I have said, one of the advantages of a committee structure like this is that we could re-introduce the intersectoral approach we had in the First Assembly in respect of certain committees. But obviously, as I said, there are going to be benefits and perhaps issues in whatever model we choose.

I was concerned to hear Mr Humphries say once again in such general terms that the committees of the last Assembly were failing. I would prefer him to be more specific in those criticisms. I know the committee work I was involved in mostly had, in fact, unanimous reports. If Mr Humphries is suggesting that his Liberal member on that committee was failing, he can do so. But I think the majority of committee work of the last Assembly was in fact very good, thorough and comprehensive. A couple of committees were perhaps more political. But it is disappointing to hear Mr Humphries make such a general statement, because I think it is quite incorrect and he needs to be more specific.

The other point I would make is that obviously Roslyn Dundas and I are the only two members on the crossbench. We are going to have a heavy committee workload. Obviously I am prepared to do the work and I have proved that I can. I think Roslyn Dundas will also do that. She has shown already a keen capacity to understand the issues and to put the hard yards in. So you can be assured this will happen. I am not speaking on behalf of Ms Dundas, but I think it is fair enough to say that we will be working very hard.

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But there will be some logistical issues. I can remember at one point in the last Assembly Mr Hird literally rushing from one committee to another. I know there was an issue today concerning the programming of when we will go to particular meetings. So we will obviously all have to respect the fact that Ms Dundas and I will be quite busy. That will have to be taken into account when we are arranging meetings of committees.

Having said that, I look forward to committee work again. I think committee work is one of the most constructive and consultative forums that we have in this Assembly. Committees undertake very important work of the Assembly. I hope that once again we will see very good reports coming out and that this government will take those reports seriously.

I have already mentioned to the Chief Minister and through the media that I am interested in seeing the Chief Minister require that agencies in their annual reports give an implementation status report on how government has responded in terms of recommendations of committees which they have agreed to. In other words, if government agrees to recommendations of committees, there should be an update in the agency's annual report of where they are up to. In this way we can keep that committee work on the agenda of this Assembly.

What often happens is that even very good reports—a lot of work is put into them by the community as well as members and secretariat staff—tend to fall off the agenda. In fact, I recall that on several occasions in the last Assembly I made the same recommendation twice—and once, three times—in the case of different committees. A recommendation had been made, we had conducted another inquiry and we saw that the need was still there for action from government in the same relevant area.

Hopefully I will get support from the Assembly or the Chief Minister for this requirement in respect of annual reports. This would be useful in helping us keep track of what is happening and how well the government is doing what it said it would do in terms of committees.

MS DUNDAS (12.14): I would like to indicate my support for this motion and also echo what Ms Tucker said. The proposal circulated by Mr Hargreaves has, at its core, a design for policy development. But I would like to remind the Assembly of the role committees have in accountability. We do not have a house of review, so committees, along with the Assembly, have an important job of ensuring accountability of the executive and the departments.

Another consideration, which Ms Tucker touched on, is the role that the government has in accepting or rejecting the recommendations of committees. I believe that these policy-based committees should have scope to research issues in the hope that their recommendations will not be ignored or put aside by the government and the departments. I hope that constant reminding by Ms Tucker and me will not be needed to ensure that recommendations are carried through.

We have a stringent process of bringing the community along to discuss these issues. If we go to all this time and effort, the community should feel that it is having a part to play in this Assembly and that the recommendations that are made by committees are not being ignored.

As I said, I support this motion. I look forward to working on the committees with the rest of the Assembly. Thank you.

MR QUINLAN (Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Business and Tourism, Minister for Sport, Racing and Gaming and Minister for Police, Emergency Services and Corrections) (12.16): I rise briefly to agree, in part, with Mr Humphries' observation in relation to laziness within committees. From my observation, the committees worked very hard but, I have to say, there were occasions when the odd member or two appeared to be lazy. Some actually became highly active in the committee only after working members had produced a draft report, and there were some less than exemplary incidents arising therefrom. I have to say that his party does have some ground, some credibility gap, to make up and fill in contributing to the work of the committees of this Assembly. I am encouraged by the words that he has put on the *Hansard* today.

MR HARGREAVES (12.17), in reply: I just wish to record my appreciation to Mr Stefaniak, Ms Tucker and Ms Dundas for the spirit in which the consultation process was entered into in the determination of the structure. I think it augurs well for the way in which we are going to conduct matters in the Fifth Assembly.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Status of women in the ACT—select committee

MR HARGREAVES (12.18): I ask for leave to move a motion to establish a select committee on the status of women in the ACT.

Leave granted.

MR HARGREAVES: I move:

- (1) A Select Committee on the Status of Women in the ACT be appointed to inquire into and report on the effectiveness of existing ACT Government programs including:
 - (a) their differential impact on women's—
 - (i) equality of opportunity;
 - (ii) economic independence and security;
 - (iii) access to and support of healthy lifestyles;
 - (iv) barriers to participation;
 - (b) violence prevention and personal and community safety for women;
 - (c) targeted support for women from specific groups within the community; and
 - (d) any other related matter.

- (2) the Committee be composed of
 - (a) one Member to be nominated by the Government;
 - (b) one Member to be nominated by the Opposition; and
 - (c) one Members to be nominated by either the Australian Democrats or the ACT Greens; to be notified in writing to the Speaker within 2 minutes following conclusion of the debate on the matter.
- (3) the Committee report by the last sitting day in November 2002.
- (4) the foregoing provisions of this resolution have effect notwithstanding anything contained in the standing orders.

I have amended clause (2) of the motion in relation to the timing of the notification of nominations. The reason for that is that if we go past 12.25 there would be all sorts of timing issues. Hopefully we won't. I was debating whether it would be three minutes, four minutes, five minutes or six minutes.

Mr Speaker, I am delighted to be able to move this motion to create a select committee on the status of women in the ACT. This is part of a long process which I believe the Labor Party embarked on some time ago and we are hoping that that sort of spirit has been engendered in the Assembly.

I know that Ms MacDonald and Ms Gallagher have been very heavily behind raising this issue of women and the barriers to access and equity that women have experienced within the Labor Party for many years. I was going to extol all the virtues of the Labor Party: of how we have done wonderful things by creating the first ACT women's council; the birthing centre—you would remember that, Mr Speaker; women's employment strategies; and a range of other things. Suffice to say that what we want to do in this select committee is identify with government programs what it is that the government is doing really well, and start to celebrate them; identify those things that it is not doing so well and come up with some recommendations for change; and start an attitudinal and cultural change within the government sector. I think that is going to be the measure of success at the end of the day.

Mr Speaker, this is a sign that Labor is actually putting some action behind the rhetoric and we are going to do something about it. I won't go on and read this whole speech. Suffice to say that I recommend to the Assembly the creation of the select committee.

MR HUMPHRIES (Leader of the Opposition) (12.21): Mr Speaker, the opposition will support this motion. Obviously a commitment was made by the government in campaigning in the recent election and we want to keep them to the promises they made. Therefore, Mr Speaker, we are happy to support this motion.

I think it is possible to demonstrate an almost lineal improvement in the availability of programs and services offered to women in the ACT in the 12 years of self-government. There have certainly been some significant advances in that time. I think bodies such as the Women's Consultative Council and the like have done some very important work in highlighting areas of need and helping governments over the period of those 12 years to address those needs.

I also acknowledge that there was an argument for a broad positional look to be had at the way in which women fare in the ACT community and their access to services, opportunities, employment and lifestyles that are appropriate to their needs and their position. Therefore, I think a motion such as this, giving an Assembly select committee the chance to be able to overview the position of women today, is timely and to be supported.

There are many issues, of course, that such a committee could examine and I suspect it will need to exercise some judgment about how far it roams across an area, subsets of which have been matters of very thick and voluminous reports in other areas in other parts of Australian political life in the past.

It will be necessary to consider, in particular, how it is that the ACT can leverage off its very fortunate position as a community, with many privileges others don't enjoy in Australia, to appropriately enhance the position of women in a way which ensures that we further advance the very significant gains made by women in this territory in the last few years.

Mr Speaker, I hope that this report will be a fruitful one. I can indicate at this stage that the shadow spokesperson for women, Mrs Cross, will sit on that committee on behalf of the opposition. I look forward to seeing its report about 12 months from now.

MS DUNDAS (12.23): I would also like to express my support for the establishment of the Select Committee on the Status of Women in the ACT. It is extremely important that the differential impact of government programs on women is fully analysed and documented. Women's organisations have, for a long time, called for the establishment of systems to achieve this.

A sound understanding of the differential impact of existing programs on women is essential in order to plan future policy. For too long the policy process, through its failure to analyse differential impacts, has compounded the disadvantages faced by women in many spheres of life. To compound disadvantage, policy-makers do not merely discriminate. Disadvantage can be perpetrated when policy-makers merely neglect the different roles and situations that women experience relative to men.

This select committee, I believe, will assist the Assembly in incorporating a better understanding of the differential impact of policy on the status of women in the ACT. Although, as we have mentioned today, there are concerns about the great workload on the crossbench in terms of committees, I believe that the matters that this select committee will consider are important enough to justify its establishment.

MS GALLAGHER (12.24): I would just like to say—and I am conscious of the time—that I appreciate the assistance of Ms Dundas, Ms Tucker and Mrs Cross in establishing and finalising the terms of reference for this select committee.

In 1998 when Labor lost the ACT election we went back to our constituencies and held a number of consultations, of which Labor Listens to Women was one. The result was a decision to form a select committee to look into the issues that were raised in those consultations. I see this as a very positive initiative and I look forward to working with Mrs Cross and Ms Dundas once the committee is established.

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MS TUCKER (12.25): I obviously support the establishment of this select committee. I just want to make the comment that I think this is a recognition that policy is not gender neutral. I am interested to know what the government is intending to do in terms of some kind of gender analysis of legislation, policies and programs that it intends to introduce.

This select committee will be looking at, as I understand it, the differential impact of existing policies and programs on women. There is obviously a place to also subject any proposed policies and legislation to a gender impact analysis. I would hope that this government will do that. I am not sure whether that ties in with work of the select committee but it also needs to be done.

MS MacDONALD (12.26): I rise to support the motion. Mr Hargreaves has already referred to the Labor Party having moved over a significant amount of time towards the establishment of this committee. From my personal experience, I am particularly pleased to see that the select committee will be looking into equality of opportunity.

In my time working for the Australian Services Union I saw many occasions when women were denied career progression, and that is one issue that I think this committee could quite well look at. I am also interested in the fact that the committee will be looking at barriers to participation in numerous activities that the government performs. I am pleased to see that the committee will be able to look at any other related matters and I think this would cover what Ms Tucker has just raised.

MR HARGREAVES (12.28), in reply: In closing the debate, I also would like to acknowledge the work of the members of Emily's List and the Labor Party Status of Women Policy Committee who actually put some form and some structure around the Labor Party's thinking in this regard.

As a male wanting to encourage this audit, if you wish, I want to see how thick this glass wall is around women—the wall that women keep trying to break but cannot do so. It doesn't matter where they look, there is always some glass wall. If we can identify where it is and how thick it is, then maybe we as an Assembly can actually destroy it.

I think it is absolutely vital that we have the attitudinal and cultural change. This needs to happen if we are going to get anywhere near paying other than lip service to equality and access to opportunity. We need to start addressing some of the serious social questions—questions such as what are we doing as a government about the social isolation that women suffer and what are we doing about employment opportunities within the public sector in real time? Instead of just talking about statistics, we have to talk about what we are doing in real time. We have to consider what are we actually doing about cleaning up the language.

Mr Speaker, I commend this motion to the Assembly. I thank the opposition for their support and, like Mr Humphries, I am very sincerely looking forward to the report.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Standing and select committees—membership

MR SPEAKER: I have been notified in writing of the following nominations for the membership of committees:

Standing Committee on Administration and Procedure

Ms Dundas
Mr Hargreaves
Mr Stefaniak
Ms Tucker.

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Ms Gallagher
Mr Smyth
Ms Tucker.

Standing Committee on Education

Ms Dundas
Ms MacDonald
Mr Pratt.

Standing Committee on Health

Ms MacDonald
Mr Smyth
Ms Tucker.

Standing Committee on Legal Affairs

Mr Hargreaves
Mr Stefaniak
Ms Tucker.

Standing Committee on Community Services and Social Equity

Mrs Cross
Ms Dundas
Mr Hargreaves.

Standing Committee on Planning and Environment

Mrs Dunne
Ms Gallagher
Ms Dundas.

Select Committee on the Status of Women in the ACT

Mrs Cross
Ms Dundas
Ms Gallagher.

MR WOOD (Minister for Urban Services and Minister for the Arts) (12.31): I move:

That the members so nominated be appointed as members of the relevant standing and select committees.

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Mr Speaker, while I am on my feet I should say that when I am no longer a member of this Assembly I will look back with great pleasure at the time I spent working on committees. They have universally been rewarding, interesting and educative and I think a benefit to the Assembly as a whole. Those members who are now to move into those committees will have a very fruitful time in front of them.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Sitting suspended from 12.33 to 2.30 pm.

Questions without notice Economic and social indicators

MR HUMPHRIES: My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, I ask whether you can confirm to this Assembly that, when the Labor Party came to government early in November, it inherited the following key economic and social positions:

- a budget surplus of \$39 million,
- an unemployment rate of 4.6 per cent,
- export activity at an all-time high for ACT businesses,
- business confidence that was the strongest in Australia, and
- an education system that has been rated by the OECD at the very top of international achievement.

MR STANHOPE: Thank you, Mr Humphries, for the question. I acknowledge it as your first question in your new role: congratulations.

Mr Humphries: And your first answer.

MR STANHOPE: It looked and sounded very good from over here.

Certainly, the forward estimates as presented by the previous government prior to the election indicated that the territory was enjoying a surplus of \$39 million. As my colleague the Treasurer has indicated on a number of occasions now, as a result of some concerns articulated to us by officials, he has put in place arrangements to undertake an audit of the real bottom-line position of the territory.

I acknowledge, Mr Humphries, that the position that you claimed to have bequeathed to this government was an anticipated surplus of \$39 million for this year. Whether or not that reflects the truth of the matter will be determined by the independent audit that the Treasurer has arranged, and about which he will be making some announcements in a short time.

In relation to the suggestion you made that we inherited an ACT unemployment rate of 4.6 per cent, certainly the indicators are that the unemployment position here is 4.6 per cent. However, that does need to be placed in context. The ACT has traditionally had a low unemployment rate. It is 4.6 at the moment, and the indications suggest that this is the lowest in the nation.

There are some real concerns about those numbers, of course, and we do need to put them in context. There are some very worrying indicators there, including the fact that the work force participation rate in the ACT has fallen by 2 per cent over the last year. The only place in Australia that has suffered a significant decline in participation is here in the ACT. All the indicators from the Bureau of Statistics show that, over the last 14 months, the ACT has lost 6,000 full-time jobs from the work force.

For a new government, these are very worrying indicators indeed, and we will take significant steps to redress this situation. In a ministerial statement to be delivered by the Treasurer tomorrow, he will give some indication of the programs that we will put in place to immediately deal with the worrying aspects of full-time employment in the ACT that we face and that we have inherited from the former government.

Certainly, there are other aspects of activity here in the ACT that do indicate the strength of the local economy and do indicate the strength of our commitment to community services, and infrastructure such as education, the other issue that you raised in your question. Of course, we have had an interesting debate about that, and we do know that, while we here in the ACT have traditionally led the way in relation to educational outcomes, once again there are some very worrying signals for us to deal with.

We will deal with those, particularly through our determination to reapply the \$27 million which you proposed to spend on your completely misguided and vote-buying attempts to provide a free school bus scheme for the ACT. We will apply all of those resources to education to overcome, in particular, the concerns signalled in the last report into the educational circumstances here in the ACT, which included a stark indicator: the fact that the completion rate of students here in the ACT has dropped. The year 12 retention rate has declined by 6 per cent over the last year. The ACT was the only jurisdiction in Australia to suffer a decline in retention rates.

This is another legacy of the previous government which we will strive to overcome and redress. This is something we will not tolerate.

MR HUMPHRIES: I wonder, Mr Speaker, if the Chief Minister would express an opinion about the other things mentioned in my question, which he did not refer to: inheriting a record level of export activity—

MR SPEAKER: Mr Humphries, could we avoid the preliminaries and keep to the question please?

MR HUMPHRIES: I am asking the question, Mr Speaker. The question is whether he will answer those parts of my question that he did not answer previously, namely: did he inherit export activity at an all-time high for ACT businesses, business confidence the strongest in Australia, an education system that has been rated by the OECD at the very top of international achievement? Will he indicate, in addition, what effect the government's election commitments will have on these key economic and social indicators?

MR STANHOPE: I am more than happy to repeat those parts of my answer that did actually acknowledge the worrying aspects of the legacy that the Liberals have left us. The fact is that, in their stewardship over the last three years, they did run down

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expenditure on education, for instance. That led us to the situation where, over the term of the last government, education expenditure in the ACT dropped from the highest in the nation to the fourth or fifth highest, in terms of per capita expenditure and rate of increase of expenditure.

This is a legacy to which we are determined to respond; in particular we are determined to redirect the \$27 million that you were prepared to waste on free bus travel. We will turn around the negligence displayed by the Liberals over their period of government. We will ensure that this enormous reduction in the retention rate and in the per capita increase in expenditure in education is simply not tolerated. We will not tolerate a situation in which this government turns its back on the educational futures of children here in the ACT.

A 6 per cent reduction in the retention rate: have you actually translated that into numbers, over the space of six years across the territory? It equals thousands of children who will not realise their potential because you took your eyes off the ball. You did not maintain education as a priority. You were prepared to squander \$27 million on buses, which would be far better used in education to turn around that appalling rejection of the children of the ACT and of the future of the ACT, particularly in relation to public education.

I am happy to repeat my claim in relation to the other indicators. The fact is that 6,000 full-time jobs have departed the scene, and that the participation rate is down by 2 per cent. What did you do about it? Which employment programs did you put in place? None. You just let it happen, and it has continued over the entire period of the last 14 months.

We have announced a raft of programs to provide genuine full-time jobs for the people of the ACT. My colleague the Treasurer will announce some of those plans tomorrow. He will announce the timetable for implementation. We will not tolerate the neglect that was a feature of your stewardship of the ACT as Chief Minister. Of course, it was also a stewardship in relation to which the people of the ACT have passed fairly savage judgment.

SACS award

MS TUCKER: My question is to the minister responsible for community services, Mr Stanhope, regarding the distribution of money to community organisations to cover the increases under the SACS award. I understand that at least \$4 million has been allocated for that purpose, but nothing has yet been received by community organisations. Given that already-stretched organisations have been reporting that, without additional funding very soon, they will have to cut their services, when will community sector organisations receive the money?

MR STANHOPE: I do not have a date on which the cheques will be payable. As you are aware, Ms Tucker, later today the Treasurer will be introducing an appropriation bill. As you have foreshadowed and as was foreshadowed by the previous government and agreed to by us at the time, there will be included in the appropriation bill to be tabled today an allocation of \$4 million to deal with the acknowledged shortfall in relation to the SACS award and the community services sector.

A process has been developed through, particularly, the department of education and the department of health in relation to those organisations that have been labouring without these payments. We do not have a timetable. As I said, an appropriation bill will be introduced today. It is our hope that, with the support of the Assembly, the appropriation bill will be passed this week. We are looking to the support of the Assembly to ensure that this bill is passed this week. We do realise that that does require the support of the Assembly.

In relation to the details of the allocation of payments, the timeframes and the particular nature of the arrangements we have put in place, I will be happy to give Ms Tucker more on that when I have it.

MS TUCKER: I have a supplementary question, Mr Speaker. Given that the timeframe is unclear, can the Chief Minister give an assurance to the Assembly that he will ensure that no such organisation, whether it is about community services or the environment, will be put in the situation where it has to reduce services while waiting for this money to come through?

MR STANHOPE: We do not intend to dillydally or to delay the payment of these moneys to organisations. We do, of course, need to engage in a process, but we will strive absolutely to ensure that there will be no reduction in services as a result of organisations waiting for payments. I do not anticipate that. I expect that these payments will be made as soon as the appropriation bill is passed and a process is put in place.

Mental health diagnostic services for children

MS DUNDAS: My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, you were talking earlier about the need for every child to reach its potential. It is my understanding that the mental health section of the Department of Health and Community Care operated a diagnostic service through the Canberra Hospital for children suspected of having some sort of pervasive developmental disorder. That diagnostic service no longer operates, and there is no public diagnostic service in the ACT. It has been reported to me that there are about 70 children in the ACT awaiting diagnosis.

Minister, you may be aware that the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service has, according to parents, closed its waiting list and is turning away people who are seeking a diagnosis. This is a carry-over from the last government. Will you investigate this matter, including by speaking with parent groups, to determine the current state of affairs? If there is a problem, will you undertake to sort it out so that children with a suspected developmental disorder that is hampering their ability to be educated receive a speedy diagnosis?

MR STANHOPE: I thank Ms Dundas for the question. I will take it on notice. I do not have the details of it, but I will be more than happy to respond to the question by close of business today.

ACT financial position

MR HARGREAVES: My question, which relates to historical accuracy and fiscal enlightenment, is directed to the Treasurer, Mr Quinlan. The latest issue of the St George Bank's *Trends* publication contains an article that considers the ACT financial position. The article, titled "Good luck and good management turn around the ACT budget", poses the question speculatively. Can the Treasurer inform the Assembly what credence was given by the article to the administration of the territory's finances?

MR QUINLAN: Thank you, Mr Hargreaves, for the question. Mr Speaker, I guess the response to this question follows on from the question asked by the Leader of the Opposition in his attempt to try to paint a picture of the rosy economy that this government inherited. Let me first say that a year and a half ago, maybe nearly two years ago, when budgets were brought down I made the remark that it was a good year to be Treasurer—as was 2001, although things have changed somewhat.

The import of your question, Mr Hargreaves, which deserves a direct answer, is: what did the article authored by Access Economics in the *Trends* magazine say? In fact, it says:

No doubt those who have governed the Territory over recent years would prefer to trumpet their part in the development of a surplus, but in this case the result is as much a result of good luck as good management.

Vindication is nice occasionally, particularly from Access Economics. I have made those statements over the last year and a half. Before the last election we heard the former government trying to delude the public as to the condition of the economy they took over. It turned out to be self-delusion. Now we see them trying to delude the public as to the economy they left behind. I think the independent observation is that it has been more a case of good luck.

MR HARGREAVES: Mr Speaker, I have a supplementary question. Since the former government did not play a significant role in the turnaround of the ACT budget position, what reasons did the article ascribe to the territory's strong financial position?

MR QUINLAN: The article went on to talk about things that have been previously identified. It said that the ACT commenced self-government with a strong debt position and a AAA credit rating, which it has held since. I might add something that the article does not mention. As I recall, transitional funding was expended, even though there have been some attempts over time to create myths in relation to cash positions and expenditure.

The territory certainly has benefited from stamp duty on conveyancing. There has been quite a conscious pull forward of housing demand by the Commonwealth government. Only time will tell whether we will pay for that somewhere down the line. Also, in recent times sales of Commonwealth property have brought in additional funding. There have been a number of federally funded projects that have kept the economy moving.

I think the point that really should be made—and I will close on this—is that the article does not appear to identify anything that the previous government did to bring about that result. I am prepared to lend the magazine to anybody who wants to comb through it.

Canberra Hospital

MR SMYTH: My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, in the lead-up to the election you claimed that an ACT Labor government would commit an immediate \$6 million to the Canberra Hospital budget to “ensure its survival and viability”. You then proceeded to promise the citizens of Canberra that Labor would provide an additional \$6 million for nurses, admit more in-patients and treat more people in Emergency. Can you confirm that the \$6 million needed to ensure the hospital’s survival and viability is indeed the same \$6 million that Labor has promised for more nurses, to admit more in-patients and to treat more people in Emergency? How many times can you spend the same \$6 million? Chief Minister, have you not hoodwinked the public, and are you not double dipping?

MR STANHOPE: I thank the member for the question. I think if there is one area of the previous government’s management of the ACT over the last six years which has horrified the ACT community as much as anything else, perhaps as much as the run-down in education, it is the way in which the previous government handled the delivery of health services.

Twelve months ago it sought to engage in discussions with the nursing work force in relation to a new enterprise bargaining agreement. I think we are now up to the 13th month of protracted negotiations that have effectively highlighted the Liberal Party’s incapacity to provide for health services for the people of the ACT or for stability within the delivery of health services, particularly public health services, for the people of the ACT. They created in the workplace an environment that was so debilitating, particularly for the nurses in the work force. The nursing work force are of course 70 per cent of the work force in the ACT.

The previous government’s inability to deal with issues affecting the Canberra Hospital was quite shameful. Its inability and its incapacity to be honest about the level of funding it was providing to the Canberra Hospital for the delivery of health services highlight the level of despair, the complete lack of morale and the air of crisis that pervaded the delivery of health services in the ACT and that were a feature of the Liberal Party and the previous government. It was an appalling performance by each of you.

We were faced at the time of the election with an interesting debate around health care and the real state of the finances of the Canberra Hospital. I come to the nub of the question. The insistence by the previous government that it had increased the funding of the Canberra Hospital by 10.7 per cent over the course of a year was a complete furphy. In fact, the end-of-year-to-the-new-budget increase in real terms was 1.3 per cent. You created a circumstance at the Canberra Hospital where you knew—

Mr Smyth: Not true.

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MR STANHOPE: It is true. The smoke and mirrors you attempted to perpetrate in relation to your commitment to the funding of the Canberra Hospital were dreadful. One of the things my colleague the Treasurer will be pursuing and talking about tomorrow is the need for a code of budget honesty. The previous government's funding of the Canberra Hospital highlights more than anything else the need for some integrity and honesty around budgeting and funding issues. You funded the Canberra Hospital in the last budget for almost no increase in throughput, when you knew that on average over the last 10 years the throughput at the Canberra Hospital, and indeed at all public hospitals around Australia, increased by a minimum of 6 per cent. And you funded them for 2 per cent.

You knew that the Canberra Hospital could not survive on the budget funding you provided for them. You knew that you had deliberately underfunded them. I think you did it in anticipation of an electoral defeat by this side. Looking at some of the decisions you took, it is quite obvious that you knew you were going to lose the election. You behaved with a mindset that said you knew you were not going to win and it did not matter what you did. You deliberately underfunded the Canberra Hospital. You underfunded them by at least \$6 million. That has imposed a real pressure on us in having picked up the reins and picked up your gross mismanagement, which is now becoming more and more revealed as a feature of your management of health, education and other areas of the ACT.

Mr Humphries: Is there an answer to this question or not?

MR STANHOPE: The answer to the question is—and it will be revealed today when the Treasurer—

Mr Smyth: Revealed?

MR STANHOPE: Absolutely. There is absolutely no doubt about it. I think you saw reference to it in the *Canberra Times* today. The Treasurer will this afternoon table an appropriation bill which I think overall provides for an increase of funding to the Canberra Hospital of \$18 million. I think that is what you will see revealed in the appropriation bill this afternoon.

Mr Smyth: Over what period of time?

MR STANHOPE: This year, now, in the second appropriation bill for this year—straightaway. Available immediately will be \$18 million. You just have to pass it. It is up to you now to pass it on Thursday. On Friday an additional \$18 million will be available to the Canberra Hospital.

Yes, we are meeting our commitment. Yes, we are meeting our commitment to the nurses. Yes, we are providing an additional \$6 million in new money to the Canberra Hospital. Yes, we are providing \$6.6 million in relation to the nurses' EBA. Yes, we are providing a total of \$18 million to the Canberra Hospital in the appropriation bill. Yes, we are meeting our promises at the same time as trying to clean up some of the mess you left us—and it is a significant mess you left us, particularly at the Canberra Hospital.

MR SMYTH: I note there was no denial that he double-dips, so it must be true. I will just read from his press release. It says—

MR SPEAKER: Mr Smyth, please avoid the preamble and come to the question.

MR SMYTH: Here is the supplementary question. Mr Stanhope, you say in the first paragraph of your press release that it is to ensure the survival and viability of the hospital. Then in the third last paragraph you say:

Labor will supplement the Canberra Hospital budget by \$6 million. That will allow it to employ more nurses, admit more in-patients and treat more people in Emergency.

MR SPEAKER: I press the point, Mr Smyth.

MR SMYTH: Will you please detail what extra services the \$6 million twice spent will buy?

MR STANHOPE: These issues will be revealed in the appropriation bill this afternoon. I am sure the question is out of order, but I am happy to make the point that within an hour or so the Treasurer will be tabling an appropriation bill that deals explicitly with these issues.

Mr Smyth: If you have the answer, you are obliged to give it to us now under standing orders.

MR STANHOPE: No, that is not the case, if I wish to push the point, Mr Smyth. But I am telling you what is in a bill that is about to be tabled. It will be tabled within an hour, if you care to wait for it. In an hour's time, you will have in your hand a bill which provides for an additional \$18 million for the Canberra Hospital. That is what we are doing. We are delivering. We are not engaging in the smoke and mirrors you engaged in. Your 1.3 per cent increase in funding in real terms in the last budget for the Canberra Hospital you tried to sell as an increase of 10.7 per cent. It was not an increase of 10.7 million. You know that was a fiction. You know it was smoke and mirrors. You know that was the budget-to-budget figure, and you tried to sell it as your annual increase in funding to the Canberra Hospital. Your real-term dollar increase in funding for the Canberra Hospital in the last budget works out at about 1.3 per cent.

You funded them in an attempt, I suppose, to control demand. I do not know how you expected or intended them to deliver health services for the people of the ACT with a 1.3 per cent real increase in funding. It simply was not doable, and they did not do it. We are picking up the scraps from the mess you left. As I said before, I think you did it deliberately. You did it knowing you were going to lose the election. I think it reflects very interestingly on your personalities and on your commitment to the ACT and to good, sound management and governance that you would make decisions in the knowledge that you were going to lose the election and that it did not really matter.

Housing affordability

MS GALLAGHER: My question is to the Minister for Urban Services, Mr Wood. Despite the fact that mortgage interest rates are averaging historically low levels and the demand for housing loans in the ACT was up by 4.7 per cent in October, housing affordability remains a significant issue for a large group of ACT residents, both buyers and renters. A major finding of the ACT poverty report was that approximately one in 12 people in the ACT is affected by poverty. It also found that specific issues that contribute to poverty in the ACT include the cost of housing and transport. What is the government planning to do to address the affordability problem?

MR WOOD: On the surface, recent housing figures would appear to be good news. There has been a reasonable growth in the number of new homes being built. Over the past year there has been something like a 12.5 per cent increase, I think, in the average price of houses. But that brings mixed blessings. If you own property, it is good news as your asset is increasing in value, but a large number of people are finding it very difficult to get a roof over their head. The price of houses has increased by more than the \$14,000 that you might get from the federal government; so you can get a bit of cash to help you to buy into a house, but you are going to be paying more in the end. But you can get in.

For those people on very low or modest incomes, which is what the questions was directed at, buying a house at any time, even at this time of low interest rates, is a bit of an ask, is a bit beyond them, and they look at renting. If housing prices go up, rents go up. I am sure all members of this Assembly have found many people coming to them about the awful strain of paying the rent on their houses. I hope that a lot of the home buyers at the moment will not find their repayments a burden if interest rates go up in future, and they will go up at some stage, I suppose. But we are looking at those people who find it difficult to pay rent. They are looking for public housing, which is pretty tight, and they are looking for rentals in the private sector.

We would like to see solutions to the problem for those low and modest income people. I know that some years ago the then housing minister—I think it was Mr Smyth—had a series of meetings with the private sector to see what might be done to make housing affordability a better prospect for those low income earners. It is a big ask, it is not easy, because the development industry is geared more towards people with money in their pockets. I will give the former government some credit for reinvigorating late this year the housing advisory committee, part of which is a subcommittee looking at housing affordability.

In the election campaign, we promised to raise the status of the housing advisory committee by giving it more responsibility. Certainly, that subcommittee will now have an important role in developing policies about housing affordability. Together with Mr Corbell, who also ran policies in this area in the election campaign, I will be working with that subcommittee to see what might be done, what policies might come through.

We have been paying attention to what is being said around the place. There was a forum here only a week or so ago, attended by some of the best brains in housing, and we had some reasonable suggestions as to where we might go. We want to look at what we can do in the ACT. Mr Corbell has responsibility for land development and residential redevelopment. Maybe there are some mechanisms that we can put in place there, since

we have the significant advantage that other jurisdictions do not have of owning a stock of land. There are a number of areas there that we will be looking to take up. With the higher profile of the housing advisory committee and its subcommittee, we hope to make some progress.

MS GALLAGHER: I have a supplementary question. What is the timeframe for this action?

MR WOOD: I had a meeting with officers and the chair of the housing advisory committee just a few days ago and we discussed the matter in general terms. There is a bit more refining to be done. I have to talk to Mr Corbell and, perhaps, some of my other colleagues. The Treasurer might play a role in that. We would be looking for a reporting date of about September or October of next year. If there is any action we can take in the interim, we will be looking at that as well.

Literacy and numeracy testing

MR STEFANIAK: My question is to Mr Corbell as minister for education. Minister, as you are aware, the OECD recently found that 15-year-old students in the ACT have higher standards than those in any of the other states and territories in Australia and, indeed, the world. This is a great credit to them, their teachers, their parents and, to an extent, the Liberal government over the last six years. I refer particularly to the introduction, despite some opposition at the time from your party, of literacy and numeracy testing.

Might I remind you that in 1996 the then spokesperson on education, Ms McRae, said:

What is the value of an inherent right to know whether you are dumb or whether you are smart or an inherent right to know if your school is one that fails or one that succeeds?

Can you assure the community that the ACT Labor government now fully supports literacy and numeracy testing in our schools? Minister, will you work—as I and the previous government did—to ensure that our parents in the ACT have full and accurate information about the performance of their children and of their schools?

MR CORBELL: I thank Mr Stefaniak for the question. The new government is committed to ensuring that parents are aware of their children's performance in school. It is essential that parents have the opportunity to be fully apprised of the performance and achievements of their children, and the moves towards literacy and numeracy testing are an important element of that.

But Mr Stefaniak is aware that his side of the house and this side of the house have a fundamental disagreement about how this testing and reporting should take place. It would be fair to say that Mr Stefaniak and the previous government advanced the possibility in the ACT of creating a league table-type system that would compare schools facing disadvantage with schools that have advantages, particularly in socio-economic factors, and which would try to line them up against each other.

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That is not an approach that this government wants to have. This government will not go down the path of opening up the prospect of comparing the performance of schools when no comparison can take into account the differing socio-economic contexts in which those schools operate. For instance, a school that is operating in a relatively affluent area will almost inevitably achieve better results for their students than a school that is operating in a socially or economically disadvantaged area.

We are not going to open up the prospect of school reporting, which will only widen that divide and reinforce the disadvantage that some schools face. What we will be doing is ensuring that parents have full access to information on the performance of their child. Those are the steps that I have asked the department to take.

MR STEFANIAK: Mr Speaker, I have a supplementary question. Minister, why is it that the results of the 2001 ACTAP tests, which were conducted in August of this year and which would normally have gone out to parents by now, will not be available to parents until the end of the new school year—more than six months after the tests were conducted? Is this a sign that your government is proposing to withdraw from this essential educational tool?

MR CORBELL: No, it is not a sign of any intention of the government to withdraw from reporting student results to parents. The delay in the ACTAP results is an issue with the organisation responsible for compiling those results. They had made a number of errors in relation to the compilation of the material from testing in ACT schools. That led to a delay in the material being ready to be presented to students. When that was occurring we were in caretaker mode, and then we were the new government. Quite clearly, the department of education, as is its responsibility, advised me on the options available to the new government in relation to reporting.

I have indicated to the department the new government's view on reporting and making reporting available to students' parents. That will result in changes to the information previously prepared by the organisation responsible for preparing ACTAP's results. That delay is on top of the fact that the reports would have been in place if it had not been for errors made by the organisation responsible for preparing them. This government does not resile from reporting on students. We will report fully on the outcomes of students so that parents are fully aware of the issues their children face as well as of their achievements in school.

Free school bus services

MS MacDONALD: My question to the minister for education relates to the cessation of the school student transport scheme. Could the minister tell the Assembly what action the government has taken to wind up this Liberal election bribe?

MR CORBELL: Mr Speaker, I thank Ms MacDonald for the question. Of course, as members would be aware, this was a contentious issue during the recent election campaign. There was a clear difference between the government and the Liberal opposition.

The Labor Party and the Labor government take the view that it is far better to be investing these funds inside the school gate, where they will actually make a substantive difference to the great majority of students. That is the course of action that I have embarked upon since Mr Stanhope's election as Chief Minister and the appointment of the ministry.

Mr Speaker, about three to four weeks ago I advised the Department of Urban Services and the department of education of the government's intention to wind up this scheme. The school student transport scheme will cease at the end of the 2001 school year. This is, of course, in line with our commitment.

The funding freed up by this decision will be spent entirely within the school gate. Importantly, it will be spent on a number of important initiatives. First of all, it will be spent on reducing class sizes in year 3. As you would be aware, Mr Speaker, this important commitment, which will ensure better educational outcomes for students in the early years of school, will result in an additional 55 teachers being employed for the commencement of the 2003 school year.

In addition, the government has made a commitment to spend \$3 million as a one-off capital grant process for government and Catholic schools to deal with information technology support. This will help those schools address the immediate concerns they face with capital requirements for IT in their schools. I think this is a far better investment than spending money on a free school bus scheme for only about a third of the ACT school population.

MS MacDONALD: Mr Speaker, I have a supplementary question. Can the minister advise the Assembly of the initiatives the government will take to provide affordable public transport for low income families and all students?

MR CORBELL: Thank you, Ms MacDonald. Measures are in place for families on low incomes. Low income families—that is, those families who are in receipt of a pension or hold a health care card—will be able to access free school transport through the targeted student transport scheme. This scheme commences in term 1 of next year.

So for those families in genuine need there is the capacity for students to get to and from school free of charge. There are distance criteria in relation to this scheme. You need to live more than one kilometre away from a primary school or more than two kilometres from a high school, college or equivalent year 12 courses such as those offered by CIT. We have not adopted a blanket approach but have put in place this criteria to target the areas of need.

Those families who previously had access to the free school bus scheme, who are not eligible because the scheme is no longer in place, and who equally are not eligible for the concession arrangement, can access a single zone bus fare system for their children at a cost of \$50 for a term ticket or \$10 per week. If they buy the term ticket, the cost is about \$1 a day. That is very good value for catching public transport. We think that is a good balance between addressing need and focusing the funds from the free school bus scheme into our education system.

Child-care places in Gungahlin

MR CORNWELL: My question is to the minister for family services. Mr Corbell, you announced on 5 December that your government would provide for 55 additional child-care places in Gungahlin and claimed that the former Liberal government had ignored this issue. Was the money to fund these additional child-care places part of the \$950,000 provided in the 2001-02 Humphries budget? I refer to page 81 of budget paper No 3, which reads:

This initiative aims to increase the availability of child care places in the ACT, by providing capital for the provision of childcare facilities, particularly in the Gungahlin area.

Is the \$950,000 in the Humphries budget where the money came from for this initiative or did the federal government, not the current government, provide the money under its child-care responsibilities?

MR CORBELL: Yes, the money has come from within existing appropriations. There is no surprise whatsoever about that. The key issue here that Mr Cornwell fails to address is that if the Liberal Party were still in government those 55 additional child-care places for Gungahlin would not be there. They would not be there because the previous government indicated that it was not prepared to spend additional money to meet immediate need in the Gungahlin area.

Yes, the previous government did make a commitment to establish a 90-place child-care facility in the Gungahlin Town Centre. That is a commitment that this government will be honouring. But additional to those places are the 55 places that we have moved immediately to provide for short-term need.

The previous government was putting in place 90 child-care places, with the new facility to be in place, if I understand correctly, towards the end of next year. That meant Gungahlin families would have been waiting another year before any immediate relief came for child-care facilities. This government did not consider that to be good enough, so it moved immediately to provide for additional places to be in place by March of next year, an additional 55 places at Ngunnawal and Nicholls through the provision of demountable buildings at the Ngunnawal and Nicholls child-care centres. That was an immediate response to demand. It means that, instead of the previous proposal for only 90 child-care places, there will be close to 150.

MR CORNWELL: I have a supplementary question, Mr Speaker. I thank the minister for his clarification of the government's policy. Will he now issue this clarification by means of a media release so that the rest of the community can understand what he was previously talking about?

MR CORBELL: I am very happy to reiterate that, under the previous government, Gungahlin was in line for only 90 places, whereas it is now in line for 150 places. That is the commitment this government has made. I have made no bones of the fact that it has come about within existing appropriations.

The key point is that this government has moved with a timeliness on providing additional places that the previous government failed to do. In fact, when I first raised this issue in the Assembly earlier this year, the previous minister said that there was no crisis with Gungahlin child-care facilities. He should have talked to the families of close to 300 children who are on the waiting list for child-care facilities in Gungahlin.

Our move will mean that 50 per cent of the families on the waiting list will have access to child-care facilities within the next 12 months and some to the 55 places available by March of next year. We think that that is a far more timely response. It is the level of response that the people of Gungahlin deserve.

Greenfields development

MRS DUNNE: My maiden question is to the Minister for Planning, Mr Corbell. I refer to Labor's election commitment to take over responsibility for greenfields land development in the ACT. I note that it costs about \$35,000 on average to develop a block of land in the ACT and that, annually, we sell about 2,000 blocks of land. I further understand that we will probably need to develop about at least 2 years worth of land before the territory receives any revenue from the sales down stream.

Has the minister been advised by his department of the costs of implementing his commitment? Will the minister advise whether the working capital required to implement this commitment is at least \$75 million? Is there any funding for this in the budget?

MR CORBELL: I thank Mrs Dunne for her question. Yes, it is true that the ACT government has made a commitment to ensure that land development is brought under the responsibility of the territory through a statutory planning and land management authority. I have instructed my department to begin work on developing options for the establishment of the authority and, in that context, the options for proceeding with our commitments to provide for land development responsibility to be resumed by the territory.

I do not accept the assertion that this automatically means there is a cost to the territory of \$75 million. There are a range of models available that the government will need to consider in how this is undertaken—for example, the models that are used in other jurisdictions whereby the cost of the land development is only recouped after the land is actually sold. Therefore, any cost of development is passed on to the developer once the land is sold. This is a model used by land development corporations in other jurisdictions.

Mr Speaker, there are various ways of managing the land development cost. I am not indicating that is necessarily the approach the territory will adopt. What I am indicating is that there are a range of models that do not all require an immediate draw on the cash reserves of the territory.

Mr Speaker, these are all options that the government is considering, and I will be bringing in a submission to my colleagues and then to the Assembly, hopefully early in the new year, on the full range of issues needed to be addressed in the establishment of a key election commitment—a statutory planning and land management authority.

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MR SPEAKER: Supplementary, Mrs Dunne?

MRS DUNNE: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I would like to reiterate: were you, Mr Corbell, advised by your department that there would be a commitment of at least \$75 million? Can you supply that advice to the chamber?

MR CORBELL: Yes, I have been advised that there are a range of issues that need to be addressed. I have been advised on the average cost of land development in the territory. I have not been advised that the cost would be \$75 million if we proceeded in the way that has been proposed. I have not been advised of that figure. I have been advised that there are costs that the government will need to take into account, and the government will take those costs into account in looking at the models for the territory resuming land development responsibility.

Members staff—contracts

MR PRATT: Mr Speaker, my question is to you as the person responsible for the administration of the Assembly. Will you seek to phase out contracts between non-executive members of the Assembly and the staff that they employ and replace these with contracts negotiated between unions supposedly representing the interests of the staff and officials representing the Assembly? If so, which union does Mr Berry consider best represents Assembly staff? What input will individual members have in the negotiations?

MR SPEAKER: I would be most delighted to answer that question if it was within my bailiwick, but it is a question properly directed to the Chief Minister. I am afraid I can't answer the question.

Mr Humphries: Can the Chief Minister answer the question?

MR SPEAKER: Mr Pratt has asked it of me. and that's it.

MR STANHOPE: I will pass that to the Minister for Industrial Relations.

MR CORBELL: I thank Mr Pratt for the question.

MR SPEAKER: I am envious of Mr Corbell, I have to tell you.

MR CORBELL: Mr Speaker, the key issue that Mr Pratt raises here is the issue of common law contracts versus collective agreements between staff and management within the ACT government service, taking it at its broadest extent to include the Assembly.

Mr Speaker, the government went to the election with a very clear commitment, and that commitment was to phase out arrangements for common law contracts and individual agreements such as Australian workplace agreements.

Mr Speaker, these agreements are divisive, they do not lead to uniform arrangements for pay that recognise the level of work that is actually done and can lead to situations where one person is doing a particular job and is getting paid at a certain level and the person in the next office can be doing exactly the same job, working exactly the same hours, and getting paid either 20 per cent more or 20 per cent less, or whatever else you want to choose.

It is an unfair and divisive arrangement which we will seek to reform. It needs to be reformed so that people are paid on the basis of the work they do. That is the requirement, and that is the objective to which we are working.

MR PRATT: Mr Speaker, my supplementary question is to Mr Corbell. Under the system that you would seek to implement in terms of staff within this place, how much control will MLAs have over the salary paid to their staff and over their terms and conditions? What input will MLAs have?

MR CORBELL: These are levels of detail, Mr Speaker, that the government has not yet considered. Mr Pratt would be aware that there are a range of issues that need to be addressed in the development of a wages and industrial relations policy for the territory because, quite frankly, the previous government didn't have one. That is the reality. No wages policy, no industrial relations policy, no policy for ensuring that we have a uniform arrangement for bargaining, no policy to deal with wages in the ACT—nothing like that!

There is work that needs to be done in that context. But I can assure Mr Pratt that, where appropriate, members will be engaged in a process of how the new framework will be brought into effect. I will be responsible for developing the whole-of-government framework. Individual ministers will then be responsible for its implementation within individual portfolios. The Chief Minister, of course, is responsible for the act that governs the employment of members staff and he will need to be doing the work in implementing the policy framework as it relates to the Assembly.

Gungahlin Drive extension

MRS CROSS: Mr Speaker, my question is to the Planning Minister, Mr Corbell. Mr Corbell, on ABC radio this morning you were quoted as stating that the government would undertake an environmental impact study and a detailed cost analysis of the government's preferred western alignment for the Gungahlin Drive extension. What will be the impact of these studies on the completion time of this road, given that you undertook during the election campaign that you would keep to the former Liberal government's timetable to have the road completed by October 2004?

MR CORBELL: Mr Speaker, I thank Mrs Cross for her question. This is an important issue. It is an issue which was of strong interest during the election campaign and, clearly, of interest to residents of Gungahlin.

The government's commitment was to seek to ensure that the western alignment was built on time and in accordance with the previous government's capital works program. That is still the timetable that we are working towards.

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I have instructed the Department of Urban Services and Planning and Land Management to put in place a process for an external, independent environment assessment of the western alignment. In parallel with that assessment, there will also be an assessment of the cost of that alignment and the impact that will have on the budget. That is a normal process that needs to be undertaken.

There are, of course, a range of other statutory measures that need to be taken as well, including variation to the Territory Plan, potential inquiry by this place through the planning committee, when it is established, and consideration by the National Capital Authority. The time frame is tight—the government does not deny that—but we will be seeking to meet our commitment in relation to timing.

Mr Stanhope: I ask that further questions be placed on notice.

Canberra Hospital

MR STANHOPE: Mr Speaker, I wish to clarify my answer to a question from Mr Smyth. I think I gilded the lily to the extent that I did not acknowledge the level of incompetence of the previous government in relation to the delivery of health services. Of course, their incompetence extended beyond the Canberra Hospital. In fact, the \$18 million contained in the bill which the Treasurer will shortly table relates to the Department of Health and Community Care. Of the \$18 million being applied to the department, over \$14 million, I believe, is being provided to the Canberra Hospital. I had neglected to mention that the previous government's administration of health extended beyond just the Canberra Hospital.

Mr Smyth: So you are apologising for misleading.

MR STANHOPE: No. In fact, I am acknowledging that \$4 million will go to plugging other holes, but \$14 million will go to the Canberra Hospital.

Authority to broadcast proceedings

Mr Speaker presented the following paper:

Legislative Assembly (Broadcasting of Proceedings) Act, pursuant to section 8—Authority to broadcast proceedings for today concerning:
 inaugural speeches of new Members;
 the Chief Minister's Ministerial Statement and any subsequent debate;
 question time without sound.

Paper

Mr Speaker presented the following paper:

Legislative Assembly Secretariat Annual Report 2000-01, dated November 2001.

Auditor-General's reports Papers

Mr Speaker presented the following papers:

Auditor-General Act—Auditor-General's Report No 7 of 2001—Managing Canberra Urban Parks and Open Spaces

Auditor-General Act—Auditor-General's Report

No 8 of 2001—Relocation to Brindabella Business Park

No 9 of 2001—Financial Administration of Training Program Grant

No 10 of 2001—Review of Certain Allegations

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

That the Assembly authorises the publication of Auditor-General's Reports Nos 7, 8, 9 and 10 of 2001.

Public Sector Management Act—executive contracts Papers and statement by minister

MR STANHOPE (Chief Minister, Attorney-General, Minister for Health, Minister for Community Affairs and Minister for Women): For the information of members, I present the following papers:

Public Sector Management Act 1994, pursuant to sections 31A and 79—Copies of executive contracts or instruments—

Long term contracts:

Tim Keady—Chief Executive, Department of Justice and Community Safety

Fran Hinton—Chief Executive, Department of Education and Community Services

Gordon Davidson—Executive Director, City Management, Department of Urban Services

Megan Smithies—Executive Director, Financial and Budgetary Management, Department of Treasury

Michael Castle—Executive Director, Emergency Services Bureau, Department of Justice and Community Safety

Rick Scott-Murphy—Chief Executive Officer, Kingston Foreshore Development, Department of Treasury

Maxine Cooper—Executive Director, Environment ACT, Department of Urban Services

Thomas Elliott—Director, Canberra Connect, Chief Minister's Department (now Department of Urban Services)

Michael Vanderheide—Director, ACT Information Management, Chief Minister's Department

Sue Ross—Director, City Operations, Department of Urban Services

Kimberley Pierce—Executive Director, Surgical Services, The Canberra Hospital

Craig Curry—Director, Schools (Southside), Department of Education and Community Services
Michael Ockwell—Deputy Director, ACT Corrective Services, Department of Justice and Community Safety
Mark Jensen—Director, Marketing and Communications, Canberra Tourism and Events Corporation, Chief Minister's Department
Khalid Ahmed—Director, Financial Analysis, Department of Treasury
Alan Phillips—Director, Corporate Finance, Department of Urban Services and
Jill Circosta—Registrar, The Supreme Court, Department of Justice and Community Safety.

Short-term contracts:

Karen Greenland—Executive Director, Policy and Regulatory, Department of Urban Services
Gordon Davidson—Executive Director, Operations, Department of Urban Services
Hamish McNulty (2)—Executive Director—City Management, Department of Urban Services
David Butt—Director, GBE Management, Department of Treasury
Brian MacDonald—Director, Industry Policy and Regulation, Department of Urban Services
Stephen Ryan—Director, Territory Planning, Planning and Land Management, Department of Urban Services
Tony Gill—Director, Roads ACT, Department of Urban Services
Mark Jensen—Director, Marketing and Communications, Canberra Tourism and Events Corporation, Chief Minister's Department
Khalid Ahmed—Director, Financial Analysis, Department of Treasury; and
John Meyer—Director, Land Information and Building Services, Planning and Land Management, Department of Urban Services.

Schedule D variations:

Gordon Davidson—Executive Director, Operations, Department of Urban Services
Peter Gordon—Executive Director, Office of Business, Tourism and Arts, Chief Minister's Department
Julie McKinnon—Executive Director, Land and Property, Department of Urban Services
Geoff Keogh—Director, Business Development and Attraction, Chief Minister's Department
Hamish McNulty—Executive Director—City Management, Department of Urban Services
Lucy Bitmead—General Manager, The InTACT Group, Chief Minister's Department
John Robertson—Director, Economic Management, Department of Treasury
Andrew Clark—Deputy General Manager, The InTACT Group, Chief Minister's Department
Kimberley Pierce—Executive Director, Surgical Services, The Canberra Hospital
Gail Winkworth—Director, Family Services, Department of Education and Community Services
Tony Gill—Director, Roads ACT, Department of Urban Services
Mandy Hillson—Director, Tourism and artsACT, Chief Minister's Department; and

Simon Rosenberg—Director, Health Policy and Reform, Department of Health and Community Care.

I ask for leave to make a statement in relation to the contracts.

Leave granted

MR STANHOPE: Mr Speaker, these documents are tabled in accordance with sections 31A and 79 of the Public Sector Management Act, which require the tabling of all executive contracts and contract variations. Contracts were previously tabled on 28 and 30 August 2001. Today, I have presented 17 long-term contracts, 11 short-term contracts and 13 contract variations. The details of the contracts will be circulated to members. I would like to alert members to the fact that the documents contain personal information and I ask members to deal sensitively and appropriately with the information.

Papers

MR STANHOPE (Chief Minister, Attorney-General, Minister for Health, Minister for Community Affairs and Minister for Women): For the information of members, I present the following papers:

Remuneration Tribunal Act 1995, pursuant to section 12—Determinations Nos 91 to 98, including a statement, relating to:

- Full-time Holders of Public Offices;
- Part-time Holders of Public Offices;
- Chief Magistrate, Magistrates and Special Magistrates;
- Master of the Supreme Court;
- Chief Justice of the Supreme Court;
- President of the Court of Appeal;
- Part time holders of public office; and
- Travel allowances for Full-Time and Part-Time Holders of Public Office.

The Notification of appointment as Ministers of 13 November 2001 and the Administrative Arrangements as contained in Gazette No S71 of 14 November 2001.

I ask for leave to make a statement in relation to the administrative arrangements.

Leave granted

MR STANHOPE: Mr Speaker, I am pleased to table today the administrative arrangements orders for the first Stanhope ministry, together with the new ministerial arrangements. The new arrangements will implement the policy program on which the Labor Party went to the election and will further good government. The arrangements, accordingly, reflect the importance placed by this government on a number of issues, including health, education, planning, women and multicultural issues. The ministries I have established will facilitate my government's responsiveness to the ACT community, and help meet our stated social, environmental and financial sustainability priorities.

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Several changes have been made to the responsibilities of ACT government departments as a result of the new administrative arrangements. These changes bring a number of functions into the Chief Minister's Department, namely, Industrial Relations and Sport. An Office of Sustainability is also to be established within my department. Housing has moved to the Department of Urban Services, InTACT and Procurement Solutions are now with the Department of Treasury, and Canberra Connect and the Arts with the Department of Urban Services. The Department of Urban Services will continue to have responsibility for planning until an independent statutory body is in place.

Mr Speaker, these new arrangements reflect the approach we as a government have taken to efficient, effective and consultative government in the ACT. These arrangements also flag our commitment to raising the standards of territory government with responsible, open and accountable government. In conclusion, Mr Speaker, I would like to advise the Assembly that Mr Wood is, as has already been indicated, the Manager of Government Business and that Mr Hargreaves is the Government Whip.

Public Sector Management Act—short-term contract Paper and statement by minister

MR STANHOPE (Chief Minister, Attorney-General, Minister for Health, Minister for Community Affairs and Minister for Women): Mr Speaker, for the information of members, I present the following paper:

Public Sector Management Act 1994, pursuant to sections 31A and 79—
Copy of a short-term contract made with Laurann Yen—Chief Executive Officer—ACT
Community Care, dated 22 November 2001.

I ask for leave to make a statement in relation to the contract.

Leave granted.

MR STANHOPE: Mr Speaker, I have tabled this contract as Minister for Health in accordance with section 24 of the Health and Community Care Services Act 1996 and in accordance with sections 31A and 79 of the Public Sector Management Act 1994, which require the tabling of all executive contracts and contract variations. Today, I have presented a short-term contract for Laurann Yen, Chief Executive Officer, ACT Community Care. The details of the contract will be circulated to members. I would like to alert members to the fact that the document contains personal information, and I ask members to deal sensitively and appropriately with it.

Paper

MR QUINLAN (Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Business and Tourism, Minister for Sport, Racing and Gaming and Minister for Police, Emergency Services and Corrections): Mr Speaker, for the information of members, I present the following paper:

Financial Management Act 1996, pursuant to 26 (4)—Consolidated Financial Management
Report for the month and financial year to date ending 30 September 2001.

I move:

That the Assembly takes note of the paper.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Papers

MR WOOD (Minister for Urban Services and Minister for the Arts): Mr Speaker, the Assembly agreed on 15 June 2001 that annual reports would be circulated to all members prior to the election on 20 October 2001. Copies were distributed as per the list circulated. I present the following papers:

Annual reports

ACT Cleaning Industry Long Service Leave Board
ACT Construction Industry Long Service Leave Board
ACT Discrimination Commissioner
ACT Electoral Commission
ACT Health and Community Care Board
ACT Ombudsman
ACT WorkCover
ACTEW Corporation Ltd
ACTTAB Ltd
Australian Federal Police - ACT Region
Australian International Hotel School
Bruce Operations Pty Ltd and Bruce Property Trust
Building and Construction Industry Training Fund Board
Canberra Tourism and Events Corporation
Chief Minister's Department
Commissioner for Public Administration
Community Advocate
Community and Health Services Complaints Commissioner
Cultural Facilities Corporation
Department of Education and Community Services
Department of Health, Housing and Community Care
Department of Justice and Community Safety
Department of Treasury
Department of Urban Services
Director of Public Prosecutions
Exhibition Park in Canberra
Gambling and Racing Commission
Gungahlin Development Authority
Healthpact
Independent Competition and Regulatory Commission
Kingston Foreshore Development Authority
Legal Aid Office of the ACT
Office of the Commissioner for the Environment
Public Trustee for the ACT
Stadiums Authority
Totalcare Industries Ltd
Victims of Crime

Quarterly performance reports

September 2001 Outputs Progress Report—Portfolio—Minister for Urban Services—Schedules 2 and 2.1

Performance Report September Quarter 2001-2001—Department of Health, Housing and Community Care

First Quarter 2001-2002 Output Report—Department of Justice and Community Safety

Labor government's commitments

Ministerial statement

MR STANHOPE (Chief Minister, Attorney-General, Minister for Health, Minister for Community Affairs and Minister for Women) (3.37): Mr Speaker, I ask for leave of the Assembly to make a ministerial statement.

Leave granted.

MR STANHOPE: When Labor went to the October election, our platform was clearly articulated and, as the result of the poll shows, clearly understood. The basis of Labor's campaign platform, and the basis of the program we intend to put in place to deliver that platform, is our recognition that we share the same core values as the Canberra community: our belief in the essential egalitarianism of our community—an egalitarianism that demands political equality, legal equality, social equality and, above all, equality of opportunity.

We understand the primary concerns of Canberrans. We know that they want to see excellence in health and education, and the protection of those special characteristics that make Canberra unique in its dual role as the national capital and our home.

A key element of the platform that we took to the election was its detailed costing. Labor was rigorous and honest in costing what we promised, based on the best information to hand—that supplied by the then government. We intend to put a program in place as promptly as we can to deliver the commitments we made. That timetable will depend in part on the state of the books. What is really in the cupboard? That will be revealed by the audit process my colleague Ted Quinlan has put in place.

One thing is certain: my government's commitments will be delivered by accountable government that is conducted in the most open manner possible. As the first step, my ministerial colleagues and I will outline this week the immediate actions in our key priority areas.

Labor set out its code of good government during the election campaign. We will achieve good government for the ACT by living our values, values we share with the community. The government has already taken steps to implement the code. Planning has started for a comprehensive involvement of the community in the budget process. The cabinet handbook is being redrafted and procedures are being put in place to ensure that it is rigorously followed. The government has proposed in these sittings a new

committee system based on government programs. We believe that this will provide the most positive and cost-effective contribution to the development and scrutiny of the territory's laws and government programs. We will substantially complete the ministerial code of conduct and reforms to question time and the timing of debates by March 2002.

ACT Labor accepts that Hare-Clarke is the electoral model that the people of Canberra have democratically determined is their preferred choice. We will not seek to abandon it. But there are aspects of the working of the system that warrant examination. There has already been some community debate about the appropriate size of the Assembly: the number of MLAs and how they might best be distributed in electorates. Labor understands the arguments for and against any increase. But the fundamental fact remains that we have a population of 312,000 governed by a parliament of 17 members. The size of the Assembly puts strains on the operations of the Assembly and on government. Labor wants the debate to continue. There will come a time—perhaps it has already come—when the size of Canberra warrants an increase in the number of electorates and members.

The public service will play a key role in achieving good government for the ACT. A strong public service serves the government well and, through it, the people of Canberra. The government supports the progress of reform and renewal that has already commenced. We will review this progress and refine it as necessary. But changes that we make to the ACT public service will not be “change for change's sake”. We will return the public service to its traditional value set of responsibility, dedication, impartiality and professionalism.

During the first three to six months of next year, the government will finalise the review of the Public Sector Management Act being conducted by the Commissioner for Public Administration, Richard Moss. We have already taken action to re-establish a joint consultative council, as mandated by the Public Sector Management Act, so there can be open and constructive dialogue between management and unions.

As part of my government's strong commitment to the principles of openness and accountability, we will ensure that key accountability laws, such as the Freedom of Information Act and the Administrative Appeals Act, give effect to those principles. Not only will we ensure that we have the right legislative framework; we will also ensure that those tasked with implementing and managing the legislation do so in a way which gives effect to its spirit.

Work will commence shortly on a social plan for Canberra. This plan will be informed by a comprehensive analysis of Canberrans' needs for services and an exercise to map the services now provided by government and non-government organisations. The plan, a true focus on social capital, will address the social infrastructure, housing, access and equity needs of our community.

The need to undertake this work was made more significant by the publication last month of a report compiled by the National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling for the Smith Family. That report found that 13 per cent of all Australians live in poverty. While the situation in the ACT was found to be better than that applying nationally, the report still found that one in 12 Canberrans live in poverty. That bald statistic points to the need for the social plan we are committed to.

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We will complete further work to understand our community's profile, to better inform the social plan and provide a strong evidence base for its development. A study of our young people will be released by the end of the year and work on the profile of our multicultural and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities will be finished by mid-2002.

My government's commitment to support women in the choices they want to make in their lives is manifest in our comprehensive agenda for women. Management arrangements within my department have been revised so that the Office for Women can report to me directly on a regular basis. The office will have an enhanced role in commenting on policies across government and reviewing appointments to boards and committees.

Violence and community safety are, unfortunately, major issues for many women in our community. The Office for Women is commencing the development of a strategic framework that will assist agencies working in these areas to approach the planning and targeting of programs in a more coordinated fashion, leading to comprehensive and effective outcomes for women.

The government also expect to work closely with a ministerial advisory council on women in progressing its agenda. The council will be a key partner in developing the linkage and networks to support women across the ACT. We have also proposed the establishment of an Assembly select committee to work with the community to conduct an audit of the effectiveness of existing activities and to address future priorities and provide advice on performance measures on issues affecting women. That committee was formed this morning.

My government is committed to meeting the needs of older Canberrans. We have clearly indicated our intention to develop a plan to provide for the needs of older Canberrans. We will be addressing a range of issues across government, including older people's housing and accommodation, health, concessions and employment needs, and older people's access to the information society. This work will be done in consultation with older people and we aim to establish a ministerial advisory council for older people by March 2002 to facilitate this process. The council will help advance our broad agenda for older people.

The government is determined that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people will have the opportunity to decide the priorities and directions for their own lives. The government has a comprehensive plan to improve the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and my ministerial colleagues will be discussing their priorities over the coming months. My priorities are to make real progress in the areas of health, the justice system and creating life opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. I intend to make a separate statement on my government's commitment to indigenous affairs later in this sitting of the Assembly.

My government is committed to building a vibrant, inclusive community and giving all people in the ACT the opportunity to lead fulfilling lives. To this end, the government has started developing a community relations program to enable multicultural groups to

share their heritage. We will work with community groups on this task, and I expect a discussion paper on this subject by ACT Harmony Day in March next year.

The government will make much better use of the Multicultural Advisory Council, comprising representatives of established and emerging multicultural communities, to provide advice on multicultural issues and programs. We will continue to provide support to the National Multicultural Festival, which will be held in February. We will also take positive steps to remove obstacles that people from culturally diverse backgrounds face in taking part in the community.

Reporting processes will be strengthened in my department and the specific needs of the multicultural community will be a mandatory consideration in the cabinet process. Legislation will be examined to ensure that it is not discriminatory. Government services will focus on the particular needs of migrant women. Translator and interpreter services will be made more available and important community information will be disseminated in both English and other major community languages.

The government has made clear its view that migrants contribute significantly to our economic wellbeing. We have started work on measures to ensure that migrants are given this opportunity. The government's programs for business migration, recognition of overseas qualifications and work experience have been collocated in the Office of Multicultural and Community Affairs to ensure that there is an holistic approach to providing these opportunities. I also expect by March to consider a proposal to expand the work experience program for people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds in the ACT government. We will also move on our promise to investigate financing options for a multicultural centre.

Canberra's young people deserve encouragement and support. This is particularly the case for young people at risk of offending. The government will provide a range of programs to support these young people and their families to ensure that they do not become offenders. We are currently establishing a project team to coordinate a new approach to youth crime prevention. It will look at issues of service delivery and coordination of responses to young people at risk of offending. By March next year, we will have established coordination measures to carry out this important task more effectively. I will be taking a particular interest in this cross-government task and the Chief Minister's Department will be leading it.

The government will not take a knee-jerk approach to issues related to crime. We will approach the task of making the ACT a safer place scientifically and systematically. To that end, an early priority is the improvement of criminal justice data in the territory, so that we know exactly what is going on and how best to apply our crime prevention resources. Work will commence this year on minimum data set requirements and collation and analysis needs to enable progression of this critical project in the first half of 2002.

The government has committed to re-establishing a fair victims of crime financial assistance scheme. The current victims of crime legislation is presently in issue before the Federal Court and, before deciding on how best to implement its policy on this matter, the government will await the court's decision. If the court finds that the retrospectivity is invalid, then those 400 victims of crime will be able to pursue their

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rights under the previous legislation. If the court finds that the legislation is valid, then the government will put in place appropriate arrangements to deal fairly with those victims affected by the retrospective legislation.

In respect of the broader scheme, the legislation requires an independent review to be conducted and completed by March 2002. The review will examine the operation of the victims of crime financial assistance scheme and the operation of the victims services scheme. Arrangements are being made to appoint an independent person to undertake that review. The government will table the final report of that review in the Assembly and will use it as a basis for community consultation before deciding on future arrangements for victims of crime.

The government considers that a thorough review of the current diversionary conferencing arrangements in the ACT is well and truly due. Diversionary conferencing has been in place, essentially unchanged, since mid-1994. We now have the benefit of some of the research undertaken as part of the reintegrative shaming experiment conducted by ANU academics to help us assess how to improve and build on the current scheme. In addition, we need to explore other innovative schemes with the potential to divert young people from criminal behaviour. We will be putting options forward for consideration by the community in the first half of 2002.

I turn to the health system, a portfolio responsibility that presents a range of significant challenges. In my view, reforms in the health sector are critical and, at this early stage, warrant my personal attention. The Labor Party made a number of commitments before the election and we have already started to implement them. These commitments will focus our efforts in the short term on a number of areas.

Those areas include addressing funding issues for the Canberra Hospital; acknowledging the role of nurses as an indispensable and invaluable part of the health system and ensuring appropriate recognition of and support for nurses; establishing a health summit which will provide an agreed understanding of our action plan for health; ensuring services better meet the needs of the disadvantaged in our community, particularly focusing on services for people with disabilities and mental health issues, and we have significant reforms to implement in these areas; and a package of support around carers and aged citizens, including respite, psychogeriatric services, in-home support and convalescence.

Also, there will be a clearer focus on the needs of our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and multicultural community—we need to work together more effectively and support our Aboriginal medical health services and ensure mainstream services are culturally sensitive—and a comprehensive plan for reducing alcohol and other drug-related harm in our community.

A key priority will be the need for healing in the wake of the Gallop disability inquiry. We must acknowledge the need for all organisations involved in providing services to people with disabilities to work in partnership and heal relationships within the sector. Together we can focus on achieving better outcomes for our disadvantaged.

The government has a number of immediate objectives in health. In keeping with our commitment, the government will immediately allocate an additional \$6 million from the second appropriation to the Canberra Hospital to support hospital services. This additional funding will help the hospital meet increased demand and allow for the employment of additional nurses. We will also enhance cancer services across the ACT through the purchase of additional diagnostic and treatment equipment.

We promised to begin immediately enterprise agreement negotiations with the nurses on coming to office. To that end, I instructed the chief executive of the hospital to use his best endeavours to resolve the long-running dispute. Under the former government, negotiations with the Australian Nursing Federation were unnecessarily protracted and acrimonious.

The government will provide interim financial assistance to community organisations to help them meet the increased staffing costs of the social and community services award and other similar awards.

The post-school options program for young graduates with a disability will open for business, accepting applications and assessing client needs. The program is designed to help young people with a disability make the transition from school to work or other occupational programs.

Just last week at Morling Lodge I opened a residential care service to meet the needs of older people leaving hospital. The service is jointly funded by the Commonwealth and will provide 11 beds in a pilot program. We are also working with the Council on the Ageing, the Aged Health Care Services Advisory Council, the Older Women's Network and other groups to complement the Morling Lodge initiative by developing a convalescence service for people requiring only a few days of rehabilitation before returning home. A facility at Chapman is being assessed for its suitability. The ACT Department of Health and Community Care will engage a consultant to undertake a comprehensive needs analysis of respite care needs for older Canberrans.

To help provide a more strategic response to the associated problems of illicit drug use and crime, the ACT police early intervention and diversion program will begin this month. The program aims to divert people in the early stages of illicit drug use into appropriate treatment and rehabilitation services. The program is partly funded by the Commonwealth.

In the medium term, the government also has a number of significant objectives in health. My government will host a broad and open health summit next February to identify and seek to resolve the many issues facing the public health system in the ACT. The summit will examine issues across the ACT as a whole and will include representatives from the hospitals, from the health professions, from the health and nursing unions and from the community. I will use the outcomes from the summit to inform further reform and to feed into the development of a new health plan for the ACT.

Coming out of the summit, I expect to develop an action plan for health. The plan will be developed following an extensive consultation process. It will set out future directions for health care in the ACT. It will examine current and future demand and pave the way

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for greater integration of services, particularly between our two public hospitals, the Canberra and Calvary public hospitals.

The strategic directions for health promotion in the ACT will be launched. The strategy will include specific programs for health priority areas, a health promotion gateway and health promotion research into scholarship and research programs.

The Ted Noffs Foundation will operate a four-bed youth detoxification service in addition to the existing 10-bed rehabilitation service. This is a most important facility. since it will provide a seamless transition from detoxification, which is just the first stage of treatment, to rehabilitation for young people wishing to give up illicit drugs. The facility should therefore be ready for opening in January 2002.

In recognition of the ageing of our population, the government will commence a planning study into the need for enhanced rehabilitation, older persons' mental health and post-hospitalisation care facilities in the ACT. We know there are service gaps in the ACT resulting in disjointed service delivery, people being transferred interstate and people remaining in hospital with nowhere to go. We are committed to fixing these problems and to do that most effectively we need an accurate picture of current and future needs.

The nurse practitioner trial will be completed early in the new year. Early indications show that the trials have been beneficial for both patient care and enhancing nursing career paths.

The government will improve elective surgery waiting lists. Through better staffing practices and more efficient management, we will increase the throughput of surgical patients. We will also ensure a more consumer friendly management of waiting lists by employing elective surgery access coordinators at the Canberra Hospital and Calvary Public Hospital.

The ACT government has an open commitment to improving quality and safety in hospitals. As a demonstration of this commitment, a consumer feedback project will commence in January 2002. The aim is to involve consumers in all levels of health care through the establishment of partnerships to ensure a responsive and appropriate health service.

The Australian incident monitoring system introduces a clinical adverse event reporting and monitoring system across the health portfolio. It is planned to produce trended reports early in 2002 that will identify patterns of adverse incidents in the ACT. These patterns will identify target areas for a territory-wide as well as an institution-based focus to minimise system issues in health. AIMS has just gone live across the ACT health system.

There are health objectives that will take a little longer to achieve, but my government is committed to working to achieve them. Labor announced in April this year that we would allocate additional significant funds to the public dental health program, a commitment matched by the then government, which allocated an additional \$1.5 million over four years to the program. Labor will maintain this additional funding and actively participate in the development of a national oral health strategy. We will

carefully evaluate the impact of the additional funding to ensure that waiting lists are reduced and there is improved access to dental services, particularly for the disadvantaged in our community.

Improving access to after-hours primary medical care in the ACT is a priority issue for the new government. Consumers, at times, find it difficult to access after-hours care from the most appropriate providers and do not always receive the most appropriate care. Hospital emergency departments are also under pressure from high levels of people presenting with less serious illnesses or injuries. It is likely that a substantial number of these people could receive more appropriate care in a primary care setting if they could access it.

The issues are complex and it will take time to develop the most appropriate solution to these problems. The government is working with the ACT Division of General Practice and other key stakeholders to develop an agreed approach to improving after-hours primary medical care in the ACT. It is expected that an agreed approach will be developed within three months, with a view to implementing it within six.

The Department of Health and Community Care will be opening an adult night shelter to provide 10 residential beds for short-term crisis accommodation. The key target groups include people with problematic drug and alcohol use, people with a mental illness and those with a dual diagnosis. We will also conduct a feasibility study into the need for a youth night shelter.

The government will move to implement key recommendations from the report by the Assembly on elder abuse in the ACT. Of particular importance will be the establishment of a single contact phone number for reports of elder abuse, the investigation of provisions for compulsory registration of all powers of attorney, and a review of the operations of powers of attorney that will include a mechanism for monitoring abuse.

Within six months, consultations will be under way on the development of a framework for carers and the development of a carers act for the ACT, with the aim of providing greater support and recognition for the many carers in our community.

In the run-up to last October's election, Labor consulted broadly with the community, in part to better understand what was required to improve mental health services in the territory. I have asked my department to review consultation arrangements to ensure consumers and the general community effectively participate in the development of relevant policies and services.

People who suffer mental illness may also have other problems. More attention needs to be given to improving the training of those who provide services to people with complex and multiple needs. Only last week the government advertised a dual diagnosis position that will look at this need.

My government has made a commitment that all members of our community will benefit equally from the new information society and is progressing a number of initiatives to address the digital divide. By no later than mid-2002, the government expects to have established a community IT advisory panel to engage the community in addressing the digital divide.

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The government has a comprehensive commitment to preserve and build on Canberra's strengths, such as its natural environment, its diverse and tolerant community and its developing economic base. Social, environmental and financial sustainability will be a priority for my government, and we will expect a report on performance in this area.

To this end, work is progressing in my department to establish an Office of Sustainability which will be fully operational by March 2002. While the precise role of the office is still being developed, it is intended that it will progress our determination to test policy, expenditure and initiatives against a combination of economic, environmental and social parameters.

The office will have a cross-government role and will act by assessing the sustainability of proposals coming forward from departments and agencies. I expect the office to have a role in assessing proposals such as cabinet submissions, capital works bids and business support. It will have a role assessing government purchasing against agreed sustainability criteria or parameters.

Mr Speaker, I foreshadowed during the recent election campaign the possible development of a bill or charter of rights for the ACT. In the course of the campaign, I made a commitment that in government Labor would work towards the development of such a bill or charter. But I emphasised then and reiterate now that the work has to be undertaken with the community. The government, however, believes that the protection of the rights of ACT citizens is fundamental.

Issues of human rights have been highlighted both in Australia and around the world in recent times. Questions relating to mandatory sentencing, immigration, terrorism and law and order in particular are relevant to all Australians. By contrast with many other developed countries, no jurisdiction in Australia has seen fit to commit to legislation which provides a simple, clear statement of individual rights, or a charter against which legislation can be judged to determine whether it respects each person's fundamental human rights.

The rights that we take for granted include the freedom from unauthorised arrest and detention, search and seizure without proper process, freedom of speech and association, equal treatment of all citizens under the law, and freedom from harsh and inhumane treatment. Privacy is another right that is currently being allegedly eroded as governments around the world become increasingly interested in the activities and communications of its citizens.

People may say that we in the ACT do not need a bill of rights, that our human rights are adequately protected here. The fact remains, however, that many of our basic human rights are not listed anywhere. They are not protected by the Constitution. They can be eroded by legislation or sanctioned practices. We simply trust that the socially and politically accepted standards of our society will prevent that.

It is not enough if there is general satisfaction about how we are treated as citizens. We need to enunciate and debate the principles underlying our approach to government. We need to set out a list of rights as a symbol of what we stand for.

It is not only important to put human rights into practice; we must put these principles on the table, so to speak, so that everyone can see them, debate them and ensure they are followed. We need to establish clearly the limits we will set in the steps taken by government and others in securing the peace and prosperity of our society. The limits to which our rights may be eroded should be writ large for all to see and understand. The fact that no other jurisdiction in Australia has a bill of rights is no reason for us not to have one here. Others may be unwilling, but we should at least be prepared to debate the issues.

The notion of a bill of rights is not new to the ACT. The last Labor government, under the direction of the then Attorney-General, Terry Connolly, began the process of developing a bill of rights. During the debate that accompanied that process, a survey undertaken by the Australian National University showed that the majority of Australians believed that there were inadequate safeguards of human rights in this country. Seventy-three per cent of those surveyed believed that we should have a bill of rights.

In 1995, Mr Connolly produced an exposure draft of a bill of rights. It set out basic human rights of citizens and made them enforceable against the government. If the government or one of its agencies infringed these rights, those affected would be able to take the matter to the Supreme Court for a declaration of their rights.

The bill did not apply between citizens, but was rather directed to the actions of the Assembly, the bureaucracy and the judiciary. The intention was to establish a set of standards against which the government could be measured in such matters as, for example, the actions of the police in arresting and searching people, surveillance, the conduct of trials in court and the provision of educational facilities. Under that draft bill, the Attorney-General was required to inform the Assembly whether legislation introduced into the Assembly was inconsistent with the bill of rights and, if so, explain why it was considered necessary.

The draft bill was designed as a non-entrenched bill. The Assembly was given the power to override it or amend it if there were problems with its operation. The bill also provided that wherever an act or a subordinate law could be given a meaning consistent with the rights and freedoms set out in the bill of rights, that meaning was to be preferred to a meaning inconsistent with those rights and freedoms. The 1995 draft bill would not have overridden other laws made by the Assembly or have rendered them invalid, but would have been used to interpret them.

I would like to acknowledge Mr Connolly's valuable contribution to the bill of rights debate. It is not the intention of this government to go over ground covered by Mr Connolly. Rather, this government will continue the process he began.

To progress the bill of rights debate I will, as announced, set up a committee, to be chaired by Professor Hilary Charlesworth, an acknowledged authority on human rights and international law at the ANU. The committee will, in consultation with the ACT community, make recommendations to the government about an appropriate bill of rights for the territory. Its aim will be to effectively reinforce and ensure the rights we all take for granted, but which are not guaranteed under the law as it now stands.

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I will establish terms of reference for the committee. They will include the examination of matters such as: what form a bill of rights should take, with special reference to whether the bill would be an ordinary statute or a declaration; whether it should apply to all citizens or only government and its officers; whether there can be exemptions from the provisions of the bill or whether it can be overridden by the Assembly; whether the bill should involve a requirement on courts to interpret legislation in a manner which is compatible with international human rights instruments; whether the bill should incorporate rights set out in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; whether the bill should include economic, social and political rights; whether responsibilities, as distinct from rights, should also be included; and the bill's relationship to the Commonwealth law.

I will be asking the committee to consider Mr Connolly's draft, as well as the models adopted by other nations. The committee will, of course, establish its own procedures and approach to the task. However, I envisage that a draft report will be prepared after the initial distribution of a discussion paper.

I believe that it is paramount to protect those rights we all regard as fundamental but all too often take for granted. If the events of recent months have taught us anything at all, surely it is that we must remain vigilant against their erosion.

In conclusion, if there is one sentiment that sums up Labor's approach to government and our determination to deliver the platform we went to the election on, it is embodied in the words of the social researcher, Hugh Mackay, who, when posed the question, "What are we in Australia hoping for?", answered, "A society that resists the pressures to give up on egalitarianism; that refuses to institutionalise socioeconomic class; that rates need ahead of entitlement." That is the fundamental basis from which Labor's platform is derived. Our commitment is to develop the program to deliver it and, in so doing, help Canberrans realise their aspirations.

I present the following paper:

The Labor Government's Commitments—Ministerial statement, 11 December 2001.

I move:

That the Assembly takes note of the paper.

Debate (on motion by **Mr Humphries**) adjourned to the next sitting.

Crimes Amendment Bill 2001 (No 2)

Mr Stanhope, by leave, presented the bill and its explanatory memorandum.

Title read by Clerk.

MR STANHOPE (Chief Minister, Attorney-General, Minister for Health, Minister for Community Affairs and Minister for Women) (4.09): I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

The Crimes Amendment Bill 2001 (No 2) amends the Crimes Act 1900 by inserting new provisions to address serious hoaxes and related behaviour where this conduct is intended to create public alarm or anxiety. The new offences are created to deal with circumstances in which persons deliberately behave in such a way as to raise suspicions that human life or health is at risk, intending that this behaviour cause public alarm or anxiety. The substantial penalty of a maximum of 10 years imprisonment is provided for the offences.

The new offence provisions are required to ensure that hoaxing behaviour at the more serious end of the scale is able to be adequately responded to by the criminal justice system. Less serious hoaxes where there is no intention to behave in a way that in the circumstances raises a reasonable suspicion that human life or health could be at risk and by doing so cause public alarm or anxiety will still be able to be dealt with under the summary offence provisions dealing with public mischief.

Debate (on motion by **Mr Stefaniak**) adjourned to the next sitting.

Drugs of Dependence Amendment Bill 2001 (No 2)

Mr Stanhope, by leave, presented the bill and its explanatory memorandum.

Title read by Clerk.

MR STANHOPE (Chief Minister, Attorney-General, Minister for Health, Minister for Community Affairs and Minister for Women) (4.14): I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

Today I introduce a bill to amend the Drugs of Dependence Amendment Act 1989. These amendments will allow the Chief Health Officer to approve the use of drugs of dependence, such as morphine, to reduce pain in the terminally ill in a more prompt and efficient manner than is currently permitted under the act.

Without reducing the strict controls already in place, the amendments will allow the Chief Health Officer to provide medical practitioners with telephone approvals to prescribe drugs of dependence in circumstances of urgent need. Telephone applications and approvals will allow medical practitioners with urgent patient treatment needs to provide timely treatment and alleviate pain and suffering.

Telephone applications and approvals will also facilitate better paediatric care by allowing paediatricians to prescribe amphetamines for the treatment of attention deficit disorder while both parent and child are present in the surgery. In such paediatric cases the Health Insurance Commission requires the medical practitioner to provide evidence of approval to prescribe the drug of dependence before they approve the funding of such drugs. Thus the proposed amendment would allow the timely administration of paediatric drugs.

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There are many circumstances where urgent approval to prescribe is required, such as where a patient has forgotten to renew a prescription in enough time to allow for the approval process or where a patient requires the prescription outside normal business hours. In these circumstances it would be more efficient and timely to be able to receive applications and provide approvals over the telephone.

While this is a minor amendment to the act, it is an important one. Drug approvals are an issue over the holiday season, when office staff may be absent. The government is concerned to have this amendment in place over the Christmas period to ensure that people who need efficient access to prescription drugs receive timely consideration of their needs. For this reason I introduce this bill today with the hope that it can be debated and agreed to by the Assembly on Thursday this week.

To promote a better understanding of the bill, I have arranged for officers from the Department of Health and Community Care, including the ACT Chief Pharmacist, to provide a briefing on this amendment to the offices of Ms Tucker, Ms Dundas and Mr Smyth. I commend these amendments to the Assembly and trust they will receive the support they deserve.

Debate (on motion by **Mr Smyth**) adjourned to the next sitting.

Appropriation Bill 2001-2002 (No 2)

Mr Quinlan presented the bill and a supplementary budget paper.

Title read by Clerk.

MR QUINLAN (Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Business and Tourism, Minister for Sport, Racing and Gaming and Minister for Police, Emergency Services and Corrections) (4.15):
I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

The bill provides an increase in appropriation of \$32.139 million to fund two broad categories of expenditure. The first type relates to commitments that we have inherited from the previous government, which were announced prior to the election. I can confirm that this government will provide for these previous commitments.

Included in this appropriation bill is funding of \$4 million for the increase in the SACS award, funding of \$800,000 for several tourism initiatives—particularly in light of the recent collapse of Ansett—and \$289,000 to fund the national eradication program for the imported red fire ant. The bill also provides for funding of \$6.6 million in relation to the nurses' enterprise bargaining agreement and \$8.4 million for the increased overhead cost allocation and enterprise bargaining cost for ACT policing. All of these were identified by the previous government.

The second broad category of expenditure relates to election commitments that this government will be implementing in this financial year. I would like to announce that funding will be allocated to the following initiatives: \$8.7 million to the Canberra Hospital to fund the employment of additional nurses—as promised—increased

throughput, equipment and system development and cost pressures; and \$950,000 to the implementation of a range of planning initiatives, including the establishment of an independent planning authority, commencement of master planning programs for neighbourhood plans and local centres and the establishment of neighbourhood planning groups and the community advisory panel.

The bill will provide for three environmental election commitments. The first of these is for nature conservation: \$250,000 will provide additional resources for the ACT parks and conservation services and will be used to assist in the development of an integrated nature conservation plan, establish an environment ACT community sport and education program and implement a strategic species and communities management plan.

The second environmental initiative is an incentive program to householders to encourage the purchase of solar hot water heaters. A rebate will be between \$750 and \$1,000. The government will provide \$100,000 to fund the initiative for this financial year.

The third environmental initiative is the feasibility and planning assessment of a cycle link between Downer and Woden. This will require funding of \$250,000.

The bill will also provide for three initiatives that are directed at enhancing business opportunities in the region. Funding of \$1.5 million to the Chief Minister's Department represents the government's commitment to the Knowledge Bank. It will establish a fund for companies and other institutions in the territory to develop knowledge-based initiatives. We will provide \$50,000 to assist in the operation of a knowledge-based economy board, which is to be established by representatives from the universities, other research establishments, the business sector, venture capitalists and government. Their role will be to provide advice on industry priorities and development. We will provide \$250,000 for the development of an economics white paper to assess and identify industry development opportunities for the ACT.

While this appropriation seeks funding of \$32.1 million, the bill's operating impact is limited to \$14.4 million. Of that, \$7.8 million is already factored into the Department of Treasury's update of forward estimates, released on 2 October 2001. The remainder of the act relates to the implementation of the government's key election commitments. I commend this bill to the Assembly.

Debate (on motion by **Mr Humphries**) adjourned to the next sitting.

Financial Management Amendment Bill 2001 (No 4)

Mr Quinlan, by leave, presented the bill and its explanatory memorandum.

Title read by Clerk.

MR QUINLAN (Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Business and Tourism, Minister for Sport, Racing and Gaming and Minister for Police, Emergency Services and Corrections) (4.20):
I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

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Today I present the Financial Management Amendment Bill 2001 (No 4). This bill provides for a number of amendments to the Financial Management Act 1996.

As has previously been stated in this chamber, the Financial Management Act is the cornerstone upon which the effective financial management of the territory rests. For this reason, it is essential that the provisions of the act clearly and unambiguously convey their requirements and obligations and also that the act imposes obligations and requirements that result in effective and efficient financial management practices.

The Auditor-General, in his report on the audit of the 2000-01 financial statements, raised concerns regarding the use of the Treasurer's Advance by the previous government, possibly resulting in breaches of the act. The concerns of the Auditor-General were raised before the life of this present government. This government views the remedy of any known or potential weakness to the territory's financial management framework to be important and has moved promptly to address these concerns with the tabling of this bill. The amendments contained in the bill will also clarify the information required to be presented in supplementary budget papers. This government believes the current provisions are unclear.

I would like now to deal with the detail of each of these amendments. Section 13 of the act provides that supplementary budget papers are required to accompany the presentation of a supplementary appropriation bill. The act requires these supplementary budget papers to provide details of the variations proposed to be made to the budget of each department for which the bill provides an appropriation.

The act is however silent on what details need to be provided. The current provisions are also silent on the need to include the impact of any other approved variation, such as transfers of appropriations resulting from changes in administrative arrangement orders, or the ability to update financial statements of other variables, such as revised economic forecasts.

The proposed amendments will remedy this situation by specifying that the variation to appropriations caused by the supplementary appropriation will show the impact of the proposed variation and that a table reconciling the original appropriation to the revised appropriation will be included. This reconciliation table will, as well as including details of variations resulting from the supplementary appropriation, include the impact of any other variation to appropriations approved under other provisions of the Financial Management Act 1996.

There may, however, be occasions when it will not be possible to incorporate an estimate of the impact of Administrative Arrangement Order changes into the supplementary budget papers' financial statements. These would be cases where, because of the timing of changes to appropriations occurring because of changes to administrative arrangement orders and a supplementary appropriation bill, affected agencies may not yet have completed negotiations in respect of changes under the arrangement orders. It is not always simple and it happens with changes of government.

In such cases amendments to this bill provide that supplementary budget papers must state reasons why the fully revised budget statement from the department is not included and that the Treasurer must present the revised budgeted statement to the Assembly as soon as practicable. The result of these changes is that the level of accountability to the Legislative Assembly will be improved through the clearer specification of the act of what information is to be provided in supplementary budget papers.

This bill also provides for amendment to section 18 of the act. Section 18 deals with the use of the Treasurer's Advance. These amendments will address a weakness in the act that has resulted in the Auditor-General commenting on a possible breach of the act by the previous government. Currently, section 18 of the act provides for 1 per cent of the amount appropriated by all appropriation acts for the year to be appropriated for the purpose of the Treasurer's Advance. Section 18 further allows the Treasurer to authorise expenditure against this appropriation where the need for the appropriation could not reasonably have been foreseen at the time of the passing of any appropriation act. Application of the 'foreseen' requirement to the passing of an appropriation act, including supplementary appropriation acts, may hinder the efficient use of the Treasurer's Advance.

The application of good financial management practice requires agencies to manage budgets to annual appropriation limits. Wherever possible, approval to commit expenditure against the Treasurer's Advance is not granted until as late as is possible in the financial year, with the aim of encouraging agencies to manage funding pressures from within their current budgets and therefore reduce the final call on the Treasurer's Advance.

In practice, this has the effect that possible calls on the Treasurer's Advance may be known at the time of the supplementary appropriation bill but are not included in that appropriation bill as savings, or reprioritisation may be possible to fund the cost pressures from within existing budget limits.

Legal advice from the Government Solicitor has indicated that subsequent use of the Treasurer's Advance, where the need for that expenditure was known at the time of the tabling of a supplementary appropriation bill, may breach the provisions of section 18 of the act.

The current provisions of section 18 may therefore require that all known possible calls on the Treasurer's Advance be included in any supplementary appropriation bill introduced into the Assembly. This unnecessarily limits the government's flexibility in issuing a Treasurer's Advance to fund cost pressures during the course of the financial year and may promote inefficient budget management practices in relation to the funding of claims against the Treasurer's Advance.

Amendments proposed in this bill will provide that the Treasurer may authorise expenditure from the Treasurer's Advance, provided the need for that expenditure could not have been reasonably foreseen at the time of the presentation of the first appropriation act.

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This amendment will ensure that there is no deterioration of the current prudent financial management practices, which result in the Treasurer's Advance not being issued until as late as is possible in the financial year when it is certain that the expenditure is necessary. The amendment will also continue to promote the sound financial management practice of agencies advising Treasury early of possible cost pressures.

Also, it must be remembered that funding of the Treasurer's Advance is limited to only 1 per cent of appropriations. This upper limit provides that this Assembly's role in the parliamentary budget and financial accountability process is in no way weakened by these amendments but that, at the same time, government is provided with some flexibility to meet unforeseen cost pressures.

I trust that members will support the bill, which is aimed at clarifying provisions within the act, promoting efficient and financial management practices and, I might add, eliminating the possibility of this government breaching the ACT, as did the past government inadvertently. I commend the bill to the Assembly.

Debate (on motion by **Mr Humphries**) adjourned to the next sitting.

ACTION Authority Amendment Bill 2001

Mr Corbell, by leave, presented the bill and its explanatory memorandum.

Title read by Clerk.

MR CORBELL (Minister for Education, Youth and Family Services, Minister for Planning and Minister for Industrial Relations) (4.28): I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

The ACTION Authority Act 2001 was passed by the Legislative Assembly on 9 August this year and notified in the Gazette on 10 September this year. The commencement date for the act is 1 January 2002.

Some urgent technical amendments are required to improve and clarify the operation of the act, particularly in relation to the transfer of staff to the ACTION Authority. Ideally, these amendments should be made prior to the 1 January 2002 commencement date.

Sections 21 and 22 of the act provide for the employment of staff and the preservation of entitlements of staff formerly in the public service. These sections have been found to be inadequate for transferring staff from the territory to the new ACTION Authority.

Section 36 of the act provides for the transfer of assets, rights and liabilities. The minister may make a declaration that assets, rights or liabilities of the territory vest in the authority. Such a declaration is a disallowable instrument, which will take effect after the disallowance period.

While my department has received legal advice that it is legally possible to use section 36 to transfer staff, the purpose of the proposed new section 36A is to remove any doubt about their status and entitlements.

A further amendment inserts a standard expiry provision for part 6 of the act, which covers the transfer of assets, rights and responsibilities from the ACT public service to the ACTION Authority. This amendment will require such sections to be completed by 31 December 2003.

I seek the support of all members for these urgent technical amendments, which would facilitate the establishment of the ACTION Authority on 1 January 2002. I commend the bill to the Assembly.

Debate (on motion by **Mrs Cross**) adjourned to the next sitting.

Greenfields development

Ministerial statement

MR CORBELL (Minister for Education, Youth and Family Services, Minister for Planning and Minister for Industrial Relations): Mr Speaker, I seek leave to make a ministerial statement in relation to a matter that was raised at question time today.

Leave granted.

MR CORBELL: In question time today, Mrs Dunne asked me a question about land development costs. I indicated in my answer that I had not been advised of the \$75 million figure that Mrs Dunne referred to.

I need to clarify to the Assembly that I have been advised of those figures. That has been drawn to my attention in briefs provided to me by the department, so I wish to apologise for any inadvertent misleading that may have occurred in relation to that answer.

MRS DUNNE: Mr Speaker, I seek leave to make a short statement.

Leave granted.

MRS DUNNE: Can the advice I asked for at question time be tabled?

MR CORBELL (Minister for Education, Youth and Family Services, Minister for Planning and Minister for Industrial Relations): I seek leave to respond to Mrs Dunne's request.

Leave granted.

MR CORBELL: Mr Speaker, I do not intend to provide that advice to Mrs Dunne, simply because it is advice for the incoming government on the consideration of options in the implementation of policy.

Adjournment

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

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

Recognition of indigenous people Ursula Callus

MR CORNWELL (4.34): I wish to raise two matters. Firstly, I would like to express my disappointment that the procedure for acknowledging the traditional owners of the land here in the ACT was not debated in this Assembly, as the Aboriginal flag was, before it was introduced. Nevertheless, I accept the decision. However, I would like to record my dissent from this acknowledgment, on the grounds that the ACT is the site of the national capital, and all residents here are simply custodians. As such, I believe this land belongs to all Australians, irrespective of race, colour or creed and irrespective of whether they are young or old, rich or poor, male or female. The efforts of the politically correct to suggest otherwise, even historically, is both divisive and tokenistic.

The second point I would like to refer to is the recent death of Ursula Callus, the president of Pro Musica Inc. and founder of the Canberra International Chamber Music Festival. I joined the board of Pro Musica in 1999, so I did not know Mrs Callus very well. However, I was impressed by her quiet perseverance, which has seen Pro Music and the international festival grow to be recognised as one of Canberra's major annual music events since its inception in 1994.

For example, the 1999 season lasted 12 days, with 16 concerts and 45 master classes. Both Australian and overseas musicians and teachers participated, with the enthusiastic support of some six diplomatic missions. In 2000 it did even better, with 18 concerts, 50 hours of master classes and another five diplomatic missions welcoming their own musicians here to Canberra. Thousands of people attend this chamber music festival.

This success could not have been achieved without Ursula Callus' total commitment, be it through negotiating with embassies, seeking suitable venues, enlisting sponsors, preparing grants or thinking out publicity opportunities. In all of these, Ursula Callus was somewhere or somehow involved.

The work of this polite, quietly spoken dynamo has now ended. However, on behalf of the board of Pro Musica, those who helped and advised, those who love chamber music and those who support classical music in general, I would like to pay tribute to Ursula Callus' memory and extend my condolences to her family.

Canberra Tourism and Events Corporation Corrective services Budget

MR HUMPHRIES (Leader of the Opposition) (4.37): Mr Speaker, I want to comment on a number of matters that were placed before the house today. We have seen in question time today and in statements made since question time what I am sure we were all expecting to some degree, and that is a process of deconstructing the work and

achievements of the former government. So it came as no surprise to hear ministers in question time downplaying the strength of the ACT economy, talking up the level of so-called crisis in the hospital, describing in less than glowing terms the low employment rate in the ACT, and so on. If we look more closely at the information tabled in the Assembly today, we will see that the record shows that the ACT is in pretty good shape and that a great number of the claims made by members opposite do not bear closer examination.

In a more general sense, some of that is confirmed by two Auditor-General's reports tabled today in this place. One relates to the relocation of CTEC to Brindabella Park. Members may recall the enormous criticism that was made of the decision made by CTEC to transfer their operations to Brindabella Business Park. Suggestions were made that this was being done certainly improperly and probably even corruptly. I note that the Auditor has found that the decision to relocate to Brindabella Business Park was soundly based and that no actual or apparent conflict of interest existed in relation to the CTEC board chairman. As you will recall, some serious allegations were made about him. The Auditor found that the chairman did not fail to make proper disclosure in accordance with section 15 of the CTEC Act.

I also note on a rather longer term basis that there is a further report on certain allegations made in relation to ACT corrections. I think it is very important to put on record that this inquiry by the Auditor-General, although not of the same nature as the earlier inquiry, does not provide any support whatever for earlier allegations made in this place about improper conduct or corruption on the part of officers of ACT corrections. The Auditor finds:

The Audit's overall opinion is that, in relation to the persons subject to the allegations examined in the Audit, the evidence reviewed by the Audit did not support that corruption occurred.

The full reasonings supporting the audit opinion are set out in the detailed report which has been provided to the Department of Justice and Community Safety.

It is very likely that the reports published in the media when the allegations were originally made would have led some members of the public to believe that corrupt conduct had been engaged in by senior officers of ACT Corrective Services. It is therefore important to point out that neither this Audit, or the other investigations and court proceedings referred to in this Report, concluded that any conduct of a corrupt nature occurred.

Again, members may or may not be aware of some quite serious allegations made against ACT corrections by members in this place. I am very pleased to note that those allegations have also been knocked out of the water.

Perhaps the most significant allegations which have been put to bed today are the allegations made about the state of the ACT's budget. We were told several times in the last few weeks by the Treasurer that the ACT budget position was in a serious shape; that it was quite likely that the ACT Labor government had inherited a deficit from the former Liberal government; that the previous government had run the territory's cash reserves down; and that spending for short-term political purposes had resulted in a deterioration of the territory's financial position.

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I note that the consolidated financial management report presented in the Assembly today paints a rather different picture. It demonstrates, proves indeed, that the territory's financial position is very strong. The predicted result for the general government sector in the budget brought down this year for this present financial year is \$12.3 million. The estimated outcome as at the end of the September quarter had risen to \$38.8 million.

These results are significant, because the Treasurer suggested that to tout such figures, in the knowledge that there were some unrealised market gains coming down the line from the territory's overseas investments, was irresponsible. The fact is that the Treasurer himself has now, once again, tabled a operating result of \$38.8 million in circumstances where the effect of those unrealised market gains has not been disclosed in the documents.

What conclusion are we to draw from this? Only one. Clearly, on these figures, the underlying financial position of the ACT is strong and sound; there is nothing to worry about. What happens with overseas markets is a matter outside the control of the ACT government.

Budget

MR QUINLAN (Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Business and Tourism, Minister for Sport, Racing and Gaming and Minister for Police, Emergency Services and Corrections) (4.42): I do not know whether members or past members have noticed, but I am not a greater wearer of lapel badges. But I found this little fellow as I was out shopping some weeks ago. I was looking for a little white whale. This is a little purple whale. Apparently all the white whales are dead. This fellow, I choose to believe, is a white whale flushed with success.

We will take a studied and serious look at the financial position, Mr Humphries, and we will come back to this place with the facts. I am sure you will spend a considerable amount of time trying to reinvent history, as you did last time. I intend to bring to this place a report on the finances of the ACT as at 30 October, immediately after the election, to give a true indication of what you left behind.

Greenfields development

MRS DUNNE (4.44): Mr Speaker, I would like to use this debate to express my regret at the decision of Mr Corbell not to release the advice he was given on land, planning and development. The fact that the policies of the incoming government leave the ACT potentially exposed to a \$75 million funding outlay is of significant importance to the people on this side and to the people of the ACT.

The stated reason that this is an incoming government brief stands in stark contrast to the long and loud touting of a code of conduct for good government, open and accountable government, and clear and unambiguous policies on planning. I refer members to the debacle of greenfields planning that we saw in 1993-94, particularly the exercise on Harcourt Hill. I hope that with this government we will not see a repeat of these things. I urge Mr Corbell to review his decision.

Recognition of indigenous people

MS TUCKER (4.45): Mr Speaker, I take this opportunity to comment on the fact that you have acknowledged that we are meeting on Ngunnawal land. I understand Mr Cornwell has different views. When we introduced the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags to this parliament, I recall that Mr Cornwell stood down from his Speaker's chair and spoke passionately against the flags being brought in here.

I support the fact—I was one of the people who suggested it—that we as a parliament should acknowledge the traditional owners and that we are on Ngunnawal land. I think it has become very broadly accepted in the Australian community that as a nation we have to heal as much as we can the wounds of the sad history of this country and the first people of this country.

I see a recognition of this from the churches. At the celebration of the Peoplescape and the concert at Parliament House there was an acknowledgment of traditional owners. In fact, an elder was invited to welcome to country. For me, it is a real step when we see the federal parliament moving in that direction. I know other parliaments do it. We are not the first state or territory parliament to pay respect to indigenous people.

It is not about reconciliation, necessarily. I have a sense of discomfort within reconciliation, because I feel we have never been reconciled to reconciliation. It is about acknowledging our history and acknowledging a need for healing. It is about bringing into the minds of elected representatives what our history is. Whatever we are now is not separate from what has been. In my view, it is important to understand that that is what this is about. It is about saying who we are now. It is about what has happened in the past. What has happened to indigenous people in past is to be deplored, and we should be sorry about it.

That gives us a space to move as elected representatives, which hopefully will mean that we in this place have a consciousness about issues for indigenous people. Mr Stanhope has said that he means to focus on that area in this Assembly in this term of government. I support that and I look forward to seeing it enacted through policies and services, through respect and through community control for indigenous people of this community. The reality is that they are extremely disadvantaged in society across Australia. We have not progressed very far. I think this acknowledgment is more than symbolic. It is very important for us as representatives in this place to have that understanding of our history in our work as we continue, hopefully, to progress towards a much more just society.

Liberal Party policy on Gungahlin Land development costs Canberra Tourism and Events Corporation

MR SMYTH (4.49): Mr Speaker, I rise to correct something Mr Corbell said in question time today. He insisted that the Liberal Party had abandoned the child-care needs of the people of Gungahlin. If Mr Corbell had bothered to consult our policy and what we would have done if we had been re-elected, he would have seen that it says:

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immediately on coming to office, provide a site and demountable buildings for temporary child care facilities while the permanent child care centre is being constructed.

The statements Mr Corbell made earlier today are patently wrong. He can announce that there is \$950,000 in the existing year's budget, because we put it there. That is a clear indication of our commitment to child care. The points made by Mr Cornwell clearly catch Mr Corbell out, and he should apologise.

We have been hearing the words "clear and unambiguous" and "honest and open". The first opportunity to demonstrate this was today was when Mrs Dunne asked Mr Corbell whether he would table some information from the honest and open government, yet the door was shut. We asked to see the document that confirmed the point I made before the election—that the promises to take back the release of land were going to cost the incoming Labor government something like \$75 million a year. We now have that confirmation. It was denied before the election. We have a right as an Assembly to see that information. We pointed this out before the election. It was denied. It has now been confirmed that the government has advice that it will cost something like \$75 million a year to service that land. I think it is fair and reasonable for us to see that advice.

My third point, Mr Speaker, relates to something you are interested in. I would like to quote from *Hansard* of 27 February. You said:

I look forward to the day when the government will attempt to convince us that it was a good move by CTEC. I think it will be a difficult battle for them.

We might recall what happened in the lead-up to the move by CTEC from the location in Civic to Brindabella Business Park at the airport. It culminated with the referral from this place of all the papers to the Auditor-General. I would like to put on the record for the attention of all the decision the Auditor-General's report brought to the Assembly today:

AUDIT OPINIONS

The Relocation of CTEC to the Brindabella Business Park

The decision to relocate to Brindabella Business Park was soundly based.

Disclosure of Interest Issues

No actual or apparent conflict of interest existed in relation to the CTEC Board Chairman. The Chairman did not fail to make proper disclosure in accordance with section 15 of the CTEC Act.

Although no actual conflict of interest situation existed, there was a public perception that a conflict of interest existed for the Chairman. The CTEC Board took reasonable steps to manage the perception.

Where does that perception come from? It might be good advice to all members here, but particularly the new members, that the things we say and do in this place influence what goes on out there. They are listened to by the press occasionally, and they are often reported. On page 6, in paragraph 1.13, the Auditor-General's report states:

The opinion that although no actual conflict of interest situation existed there was a public perception that a conflict of interest existed for the Chairman, and that the CTEC Board took reasonable steps to manage the perception was based on the following findings.

- Debate in the Legislative Assembly and subsequent media comment led to a public perception of a conflict of interest.

There was no conflict of interest. How did the perception that there was get started? Things were asserted in this place that simply were not true. I think it behoves us all to make sure that when we go public we know what we are talking about before we put the reputations of citizens of this territory at risk.

I look forward to apologies from those who made comments that alleged or imputed that there was a conflict of interest. I look forward to apologies to those two men who were slurred by what happened in this place. The Auditor makes it quite clear that that was wrong.

The report makes some suggestions. I am sure some will clutch at these suggestions as an indication that there was something untoward going on. They are about process and better ways of doing things. We can all learn better ways to do things. The opinion that the decision to relocate to Brindabella Business Park was soundly based is supported by the following positive findings:

- CTEC considered the accommodation in a timely manner ...
- CTEC engaged a qualified consultant ...
- A wide range of opinions was received ...
- Properties were short-listed ...
- Accommodation options were considered ...
- The decision to relocate to Brindabella Business Park was consistent with the outcomes of the financial analysis; that is, the Brindabella Business Park option provided accommodation that best suited CTEC's requirements and was least expensive overall.

MR SPEAKER: The member's time has expired.

Child-care places in Gungahlin

MR CORBELL (Minister for Education, Youth and Family Services, Minister for Planning and Minister for Industrial Relations) (4.54): Mr Smyth has raised in the adjournment debate this evening the issue of child-care places in Gungahlin. I just want to clarify Mr Smyth's comments, because Mr Smyth seems to be putting forward the suggestion that if the Liberal Party had been re-elected to government they would have proceeded in the same way Labor has proceeded and immediately addressed the crisis in child-care places in Gungahlin.

Mr Speaker, this is not the case. What Mr Smyth fails to outline is that the Liberal Party had no intention of adding any more than the 90 places they had already committed through the budget process. That is the difference—and it is a big difference for families who are waiting to get a long-day child-care place in Gungahlin close to where they live and where they can drop their child off on the way to work. Perhaps they work part time

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and they want their child in care close to where they live so they do not have to travel across town. Mr Speaker, that is the substantive difference.

This government has moved to put in place demountables to provide additional places. Mr Smyth is saying that the Liberals, if they had been elected—and it is all hypothetical now, I guess—would have put in place demountables to accommodate those 90 places they had already committed to, not places on top of that, which is what this government has done.

This government has put in place an extra 55 places, on top of the commitment given by the previous government, to address child-care demand in Gungahlin. Over 300 families are waiting for additional child-care places in Gungahlin. It took lobbying and argument from the Labor Party, when we were in opposition, even to get the previous government to acknowledge that there was a problem. When I first raised this issue in the Assembly, over six months ago—in fact, at the beginning of this year—the then minister responsible, Mr Moore, said, “There is no crisis.”

His department then did an analysis. What did they find? There was a crisis. As usual, the response from the previous government was: “No problem.” When the facts were presented to them, the response was: “Oh dear, we had better respond.” That is not the mark of a government that has its ear to the ground and understands the issues that people in areas like Gungahlin are facing.

This government does understand those issues. This government is proud to be able to respond to those issues promptly. The fact which members on the other side of this place can never escape is that this government has provided an additional 55 child-care places that would not have been provided if the Liberal Party had been re-elected in October.

Mental health diagnostic services for children

MR STANHOPE (Chief Minister, Attorney-General, Minister for Health, Minister for Community Affairs and Minister for Women) (4.57): Mr Speaker, I want to respond to a question asked by Ms Dundas at question time earlier today in relation to mental health diagnostics for children.

Mr Speaker, the member’s question referred to access to psychology assessments for autism spectrum disorder. For historical reasons, responsibility for assessment of children for autism spectrum disorder has been shared between service providers in the ACT. In recent time there has been considerable difficulty in ensuring adequate provision of high-quality assessment services, due to increasing demand in the ACT and the relative lack of trained psychologists in both the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service and the Child Health and Development Service.

I acknowledge that families and children in the ACT have experienced unnecessary added stress because of the fragmentation of autism spectrum disorder assessment services. As an interim measure to address long waiting times, two private psychologists have been contracted by the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service to assess all the children who had registered for assessment prior to the end of June 2001.

I am pleased to advise that the Child Health and Development Service, which is the responsibility of my colleague Mr Corbell, will shortly commence responsibility for diagnosis and assessment. ACT families will then be able to access the one-stop shop for assessments.

I hope that is helpful, Ms Dundas. If it is not, I will be happy to provide further information.

Liberal Party policy on Gungahlin

MR STEFANIAK (4.58): I would remind the minister for family services that the Liberal Party policy on what the Canberra Liberals would do for Gungahlin clearly states:

immediately on coming to office, provide a site and demountable buildings for temporary child care facilities while the permanent child care centre is being constructed.

Mr Cornwell: What was that? Immediately on what?

MR STEFANIAK: Immediately on coming to office.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

The Assembly adjourned at 4.59 pm.