



**DEBATES**

OF THE

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

FOR THE

AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

**HANSARD**

26 June 2002

**Wednesday, 26 June 2002**

Magistrates Court (Refund of Fees) Amendment Bill 2002.....	2219
Bio-bins—Chifley trial .....	2220
O’Connell Centre .....	2230
East O’Malley—land auction.....	2231
Brindabella—election commitments .....	2242
Questions without notice:	
Cost of land development .....	2248
Budget .....	2250
Mugga Lane tip—operation of facilities .....	2252
Hospital funding.....	2252
Charnwood skate park.....	2256
Home birth program .....	2258
Education reviews .....	2259
Land release .....	2260
City Library.....	2263
Funding of non-government schools .....	2264
Public dental health program .....	2265
Auditor-General’s Report No 4 of 2002.....	2268
Executive contracts.....	2268
Drug dependence (Matter of public importance).....	2269
Brindabella—election commitments .....	2283
Low-income, self-funded retirees—pension benefits .....	2295
Canberra 400 V8 supercar event—contract.....	2302
Adjournment .....	2304

**Wednesday, 26 June 2002**

**The Assembly met at 10.30 am.**

*(Quorum formed.)*

**MR SPEAKER** (Mr Berry) took the chair and asked members to stand in silence and pray or reflect on their responsibilities to the people of the Australian Capital Territory.

## **Magistrates Court (Refund of Fees) Amendment Bill 2002**

**Ms Tucker**, pursuant to notice, presented the bill and its explanatory memorandum.

Title read by Clerk

**MS TUCKER** (10.33): I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

This is a fairly simple bill, but one of great interest to people who feel the need to lodge appeals with the Administrative Appeals Tribunal—or the AAT as it known—against decisions by government officials that adversely affect them, either directly or as a third party.

Of interest to my constituents are appeals against development approvals and approvals for tree removals. The AAT has the power to review decisions under a wide range of acts. At present, court and tribunal fees, including those of the AAT, are determined by the minister under section 248A of the Magistrates Court Act 1930.

The current fee for lodging an application for a review of a decision under the Land Planning and Environment Act 1991 is \$138. Under other acts, it is \$200 for a review. As an aside, these fee rates are an issue in themselves. These amounts may not seem high, but they have been imposed as a way of discouraging people from putting up frivolous appeals. Whether such fees are necessary is debatable.

Most people who lodge third party appeals do not relish the opportunity. They generally feel it is a burden they could well do without. Mounting an AAT appeal is not an easy process. It involves time and expense—not just the application fee, but in some cases the expense of seeking their own legal assistance. It is not something people do lightly. The Attorney-General may wish to review the fee rates, particularly the necessity for a different rate for planning appeals. But that is a separate issue to the bill I am presenting.

What concerns me especially is that the imposition of fees creates an unfair situation. If the appeal is successful, the person who lodged the application for an appeal has effectively been forced to pay out money to prove that their concerns about the decision were valid. If the original decision-maker had taken these concerns into account at the outset, then the person would have been saved the expense of having to lodge an appeal.

26 June 2002

The imposition of a fee for making an appeal is already a disincentive to people who are affected by decisions. The lack of provision for a refund in successful cases merely compounds this disincentive. My bill, therefore, allows a refund of fees for lodging an application with the AAT if the appeal ends in the applicant's favour.

I understand there was once a similar provision in the Administrative Appeals Tribunal Act for refunds of application fees where the appeal was successful. However, this was removed by the Justice and Community Safety Legislation Amendment Act 2000. This act made a wide range of amendments to various acts, including the bringing together of provisions regarding the setting of court and tribunal fees and placing them in the Magistrates Court Act. However, in the process, the provision for refund of fees, which at the time was contained in a subsection in the AAT Act, was deleted by the former Liberal government.

I admit that, at the time the Justice and Community Safety Amendment Bill was debated, I was not aware of this change, and I think other non-government members were in a similar situation. In hindsight, I do not think this amendment should have been passed, as it is unfair to people who have valid grounds of appeal.

It is not a monumental change, but I believe it is about time this anomaly was corrected. It made it possible for the Attorney-General to issue a determination on fees under section 248A, which contains provision for a refund. However, I do not want to leave the application of this important principle to the whim of the minister of the day. It should be written into the legislation.

I am aware that the government has foreshadowed changes to the appeal system for development approvals, which may, in some way, affect the operation of the AAT. Given that the AAT hears a range of appeals, my bill still stands. However, in relation to planning appeals, my intention in putting this bill forward now is to flag to the government that the principles behind my bill should be incorporated into any separate appeal system. I commend this bill to the Assembly.

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

## **Bio-bins—Chifley trial**

**MS MacDONALD** (10.39): I move:

That this Assembly:

- (1) notes the trial of a third bin for green and food waste in Chifley, the Household Organic Material Collection Trial, and thanks the residents of Chifley for their participation in the trial;
- (2) welcomes the release of the Report on the Bio Bin trial and notes the results;
- (3) congratulates ACT Waste on the innovative trial; and
- (4) looks forward to a cost effective and environmentally friendly way to deal with green and household waste in the near future.

Mr Speaker, I rise today to speak about one of the initiatives of ACT No Waste—the Chifley bio-bins organics trial. From 9 August 2000 until 27 June 2001, a trial was conducted in Chifley which focused on the collection of food and kitchen waste using a third bin.

The main aim of the trial was to determine if an organic collection service was able to effectively separate organics into a stream for reprocessing, thereby reducing the levels of domestic waste going into landfill. In the ACT, 52 per cent of the contents of domestic garbage bins is made up of food and kitchen wastes. That amounts to 23,450 tonnes.

Whilst the bins were designed mainly for the collection of food and kitchen waste, small amounts of garden prunings, lawn clippings and leaves were also collected. Larger amounts of garden waste were not collected because of the scale of garden waste generated in Canberra—being the garden city. That is, over 90,000 tonnes of waste is delivered to recycling services in Canberra each year, which is double the amount of garbage collected in Canberra.

The objectives of the trial were (1) to trial the separate collection of food and kitchen waste for reprocessing; (2) to investigate the amount of food and kitchen waste generated by a suburb containing approximately 1,000 residences, and monitor seasonal variations; (3) to determine the viability of separately collecting food and kitchen waste from the residual garbage stream and reduce the frequency of residual waste collections; and (4) to process the material into a reusable product which meets Australian Standard 4454-1999.

Chifley was chosen as the most suitable suburb for the trial because it had the closest to average demographics in household numbers, age distribution, incomes, et cetera. It also fitted the requirement of having between 800 and 1,200 households. Single households in Chifley were supplied with an 85 litre mobile bin, while multi-unit complexes were provided with 240 litre mobile bins, for shared use. As well as the outside mobile bins, each household was provided with a kitchen tidy bin.

Results from the trial showed that approximately 60 per cent of Chifley residents regularly used the maroon-lidded bins provided to separate their household organic waste from their normal domestic waste. On average, about four tonnes of organic waste was collected each week. Whilst contamination levels in the bio-bins were low at the start of the trial, they increased during the latter months, and this was of concern.

All of the Chifley residents—that includes myself because I participated in this trial—are to be thanked and commended for participating in the Chifley bio-bin trial. Their feedback has been instrumental in the evaluation of the trial. Whilst the trial demonstrated that 60 per cent of organic materials could potentially be recovered by a third bin for Canberra residences, the cost of providing a separate bio-bin service could be better utilised by paying for reprocessing of the waste in the garbage bins—and it would be fiscally irresponsible to move to have a third bin provided around the entirety of Canberra.

The Department of Urban Services recently conducted an expression of interest process to try to identify suitable technology for reprocessing of collected domestic waste. A number of options were proposed, but most were found to be still developing, and

26 June 2002

a selection of technology has been delayed. The ACT government will therefore continue to monitor evolving technologies and trends elsewhere, to identify the best future option for recovering household waste from Canberra residences.

Until a suitable reprocessing technology becomes viable, Canberra residents can still play their part by composting their waste and food organics at home and by using the available recycling services, such as Canberra Sand and Gravel and the other service provided to take green waste.

I would also say that, in the Chifley trial, there was a large percentage of people who were very supportive of the trial going ahead. I say that from personal knowledge because, during the election campaign, I conducted my own survey—in addition to the survey conducted by ACT No Waste.

**Mr Corbell:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker: there is a lot of discussion in the chamber. Ms MacDonald is speaking to a motion. I doubt whether any members are really listening. They seem to be participating in other discussions in the chamber.

**MR SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr Corbell. Members, Ms MacDonald is delivering a motion to the Assembly. It would be proper for us to either pay attention or leave the chamber.

**MS MacDONALD:** Thank you, Mr Speaker, and thank you, Mr Corbell. I know that waste does not interest everybody, but it is an important matter to all residents of the ACT, if we are trying to reduce the amount of waste that goes back to landfill.

I was saying that I conducted my own survey, to which I received a response rate of about 10 per cent. I believe that is a fairly high response rate for surveys. Over 90 per cent of people were in favour of the bio-bin trials. I know there are a number of people in Chifley who are disappointed that the trial will not be continued but, as I said, it would be fiscally irresponsible to continue it. We are almost at the point where the residual waste for kitchen and other food scrap waste will be able to be reprocessed from the garbage bin.

During the bio-bin trial, all the organic material collected was converted to compost by Corkhill Bros. That compost was of a very high quality and has been used around Canberra gardens. Some of that composted material was provided to Melrose Primary School, which had assisted in facilitating information sessions to people in Chifley who were about to participate in the trial.

There were three composting and worm farming sessions conducted shortly after the trial finished. About 50 people attended that. A number of people, including myself, were not able to get along to that, because of the election campaign at the time. As I was door-knocking in Chifley, I met a number of people who were disappointed that they had been unable to make it to that information session. When I met with Leigh Palmer and other people from ACT No Waste, I told them there were a number of people who had expressed disappointment that they had been unable to make it.

On 1 June this year, we organised another free composting and worm farming trial. I attended that, along with approximately 20 others. That was a fairly successful rate. It shows the interest of the residents of Chifley in reducing the amount of waste that goes into landfill and in the offering of a service which provides for composting.

One of the successes of the bio-bin trial is that it has raised the awareness of residents of Chifley. A number of residents have now moved to having trash packs, as well as doing composting and worm farming, to reduce the amount of waste to go into landfill.

People should be aware that not all trash packs are recycled or composted. They should be aware that they need to find out whether their trash pack provider is making sure that the contents of the trash pack are being recycled, where appropriate.

Mr Speaker, I commend ACT No Waste for this and other initiatives in trying to achieve our target of having no waste by the year 2010. Of course, other initiatives have taken place. Second-hand Sunday has been immensely popular with certain people within the ACT. I understand there has been a trial within Belconnen shops, to try to get recyclables separated from the normal garbage, so that those are sent off for recycling.

In yesterday's budget, there was an announcement of an increase in tip fees. This is also part of the strategy to encourage people to recycle where possible, rather than just dumping all their refuse at the tip. Some people might ask, "How does an increase in tip fees benefit me?"

A comparison can be done of tip fees in Canberra to tip fees in places like Sydney or Melbourne. The tip fee here in Canberra is presently \$33 per tonne and will be going up to \$44 per tonne. However, if you compare that to Chullora in New South Wales, the tip fee is \$93.60 per tonne. Forty-four dollars is still less than half of what is being charged in a Sydney suburb. If you look at Seven Hills, it is \$92.50 per tonne and, at Lucas Heights, it is \$76.90 per tonne, which is not quite double the Canberra amount.

Looking at other areas of a similar size, in Wollongong it is \$51.20 per tonne and in Newcastle it is \$65 per tonne. There are examples in Victoria. Bairnsdale Council is at the same rate of \$44 per tonne and Manningham Council is \$60 per tonne—again more than we pay.

Brimbank Council is mentioned, which charges less than we are about to charge, but more than what we currently charge—\$36 per tonne. We are looking towards increasing the charges because it has been found that, with the amount of waste being dumped into landfill, we are paying approximately double what people are paying us to get rid of the waste.

A flyer is being put together, in which people will be encouraged to look at sorting out what they are dumping. We are aiming mainly at commercial operators. It is not really the small householders, who bring their waste in of a weekend in the back to their cars, that we are aiming at. That will be based on whether they have a small, medium or large load in the back of their vehicle. It will cost \$6, \$12 or \$18, depending on the size of the load.

26 June 2002

Mr Speaker, I congratulate ACT No Waste, the people of Chifley and the people of Canberra for embracing the bio-bin trial. I look forward to the further initiatives which ACT No Waste and the ACT government will be implementing to encourage people to reduce their waste so we can have no waste by the year 2010. I commend the motion.

**MRS DUNNE (10.52):** Mr Speaker, I rise in support of Ms MacDonald's motion. It is good to see that, on the day after the budget, we are getting down to, and dirty on, the big issues. Whilst I support the thrust of the motion, I think it is an unfortunate waste of the Assembly's time, when we should be focusing on issues in relation to the budget.

I also take note of the warm commendation for ACT Waste contained in Ms MacDonald's speech. It is a testament to the bold and innovative approach of the previous government, which has a proud history of instituting the policy of no net waste to landfill by 2010. I am glad to see that this is endorsed so warmly by Ms MacDonald.

Now that we have seen the end of the Chifley trial of the bio-bins, it seems this innovation is not going to continue. In many ways, I am regretful of that, but I know there were problems with the trial, with high levels of contamination of non-biodegradable materials towards the end of the trial. I gather it started off well, but people became lax as the trial went on. That makes the whole process of sorting and recycling more expensive. You end up putting a lot of it into landfill anyhow, because it is contaminated.

It is a shame that the trial is not going to proceed. That means there is going to be a considerable call on ACT Waste to come up with an innovative way of encouraging the process of recycling and sorting at source.

We are looking at a new generation of technology in relation to recycling and separating the components but, at the same time, we need to encourage each resident to take an active part in ensuring the ongoing success of the policy of aiming at no net waste to landfill by 2010. In doing that, we must encourage people to do the three Rs—reduce, re-use and recycle. That will help to find ways of getting as much stuff out of the waste stream as possible.

I know there has been a bevy of garbage and recycling management people through the Assembly, touting their wares to a number of members, and to anyone who cared to listen about innovations and different ways of handling recycling. Some of those are very high tech and very gee-whiz.

My principal concern about many of the proposals put forward is that it takes the responsibility away from the householder and the business to separate their waste in particular ways. When you do not think about that, you become indiscriminating and end up putting more things out for landfill because you have abdicated the responsibility to somebody who will sort it out further downstream.

Although we may move our technology to something which is more high tech than we currently have, I hope we can continue to see a system where members of the public are engaged and actively participate in the process of recycling, and reducing their waste stream at the very outset.

**MS DUNDAS** (10.56): I will be speaking to the motion. I seek leave to move the amendments circulated in my name.

Leave granted.

**MS DUNDAS:** I would now like to move the amendments to the motion circulated in my name:

(1) Insert new paragraph 3A

“3A calls on the Government to recommence the Bio Bins trial in Chifley and to expand the Bio Bin trial to the north of Canberra in a suburb or suburbs that provide a demographic contrast to Chifley; and”.

(2) Insert “across Canberra” after the word “waste” in paragraph (4).

Mr Speaker, if no waste by 2010 is to become a reality, then separation and recycling of green and food waste will have to be accomplished for the whole of Canberra. As most of us would be aware, slightly over half the weight of household waste currently going to landfill is recyclable food and kitchen waste.

As the average household size decreases, more people are living in medium and high-density housing which provides limited scope for on-site composting. This makes collection systems such as bio-bins incredibly important.

The Chifley bio-bin trial was received with great community enthusiasm. As Ms MacDonald has discussed, 90 per cent of households took part in the trial. The trial greatly increased community awareness about the high proportion of valuable compostable waste currently going to landfill. The trial also made many residents reconsider how they dealt with their other waste.

I am aware that a number of residents phoned the Department of Urban Services at the conclusion of the Chifley trial. They expressed their disappointment that the trial was ending and asked for more information about how to recycle their kitchen and food waste. Some also requested that the bio-bin system be continued on a voluntary basis. On a less positive note, the contamination of bio-bins by non-compostable rubbish increased dramatically when residents were notified that the trial was finishing. I believe this is because residents felt disappointment at the government not having sufficient commitment to the no waste strategy to turn the trial into a permanent collection program—hence people became cynical about the program.

We know that the bio-bin trial in Chifley was evaluated as it progressed and the results disseminated to participating households. It would appear then that the government had sufficient time to evaluate the success of the trial by the time the nine months of the trial had elapsed. This information would have enabled the department to modify the system, as required, to address identified problems. I wanted to see—and I believe the community wants to see—the continuation of bio-bins in Chifley and the introduction of such a system to other parts of Canberra.

26 June 2002

Therefore, my amendments, whilst supporting the gist of Ms MacDonald's motion, call on the government to recommence the bio-bin trial in Chifley and get it right this time. If the information is there identifying the problems, let us use that information to refine the trial. Let us modify the trial and start again with more information and more data—to make bio-bins workable not only in the suburb of Chifley. I would like to see the introduction of bio-bins in other Canberra suburbs, initially on a trial basis, preferably in North Canberra. There would be a greater contrast, a greater number of people using bio-bins in a different part of Canberra. We could see how it worked. Hopefully we would then have a broader understanding of how the community takes on the challenge of bio-bins and recycling of that waste.

With the possibility of tip fees increasing, we should be providing services to support the community to reduce, re-use and recycle. We cannot just make it harder for them to use the tip. We need to make it easier, at the other end, for them to dispose of their waste in a more environmentally aware manner. Bio-bins are an important part of that. We should not punish those who cannot compost, but encourage them to use bio-bins and other forms of reduce, recycle and re-use technology.

The bio-bins trial was a commendable part of what the ACT government was doing as part of the no waste by 2010 initiative, let us not now dismiss it. Let us use the information we have to make it work, and to make it broader. The year 2010 is just around the corner. We cannot delay action to make the goal of no waste a reality.

**MR WOOD** (Minister for Urban Services and Minister for the Arts) (11:01): This is an important debate. The current domestic collection system was introduced in 1994. At that time, with contracts coming to an end, it was timely to determine the best future options for domestic waste collection, to help us to meet the target of no waste by 2010.

The Chifley bio-bin trial was conducted to identify the potential to separate organic wastes, as one aspect of determining future services. The contract for future services is presently being examined. Timing was quite important, to see whether something should be repeated.

The Department of Urban Services also conducted an expression of interest process to identify potential technologies for the collection and reprocessing of domestic waste. A number of reprocessing options were proposed, including composting, anaerobic digestion and energy recovery. However, most technologies, then, were found to be not fully commercialised. There are risks in selecting a technology which is at that stage.

Whilst the Chifley trial demonstrated that 60 per cent of organic material could potentially be recovered by a third bin collection service, the cost of providing a separate bio-bin service is significant. It was therefore determined that a better overall result could be achieved through the future establishment of an appropriate reprocessing technology. We are still looking for that. The ACT government will continue to monitor evolving technologies and trends elsewhere, to identify the best future option for recovering household wastes from our residences.

Until a suitable reprocessing technology becomes viable, Canberra residents can still play their part in reducing waste by composting kitchen and food organics at home, and using the available recycling services. For example, the ACT community is already

leading the nation in recycling of garden organics, with a recovery rate of over 80 per cent. There is still a significant task ahead to reach the target of no waste by 2010.

Mrs Dunne has said we need innovative ways to accomplish that target. That is certainly the case, and we are looking for a new generation of technologies and ideas to do it. Ms Dundas is absolutely right. We have to see that food waste, across the whole of Canberra, is taken out of the dumping cycle and used—that it is put into some form of composting or other means used—to keep it out of the dumping area. There is no difficulty about that. Ms Dundas pointed to the problem—it is a growing problem in Canberra—of more and more people living in units and therefore not having a garden in which to dispose of their waste.

I live in a household of two people, mostly, with family and friends coming at weekends. Like most families in Canberra, we have been able to reduce the quantity of waste going into the rubbish bin once a week to less than a Woolworths shopping bag full. Indeed, some weeks we do not put it out at all. I have a compost bin and a garden, of sorts, that I put it into, but not everybody can do that.

**Mr Humphries:** You do not have children.

**MR WOOD:** I do not have children—I stress that point—although, at the weekends, very often I do. Having a garden is a very significant factor. One of the mechanisms we will be looking at in the future is whether, for those people who have gardens, we will provide a composting bin, although I would be surprised if there are very many gardens these days without a composting bin. I thought that was pretty standard procedure.

We understand the problem. I am full of admiration for the government which, some years ago, established this target of no waste by 2010. We do not yet have the answer as to how we are going to get every last bit of waste out of the system. There is quite a long way to go, but the easiest part of it is the organic material. So we will be focusing on that.

I have full sympathy with Ms Dundas' amendments. I support the idea of keeping at it, but I would not support the first of her amendments. We certainly would not go back to Chifley. That suburb was chosen because it had the best representation of what you find in Canberra. It was a very good sample area. We would not go back there—and I do not think we need a demographic contrast to Chifley.

We certainly need to keep a very heavy focus on how we are going to achieve this target. I thank members. The mover of the motion will thank members for their support. She may indicate that it is likely we will not support the first of those amendments, but will support the second amendment.

**MS TUCKER (11.07):** The Greens congratulate ACT Waste for initiating this trial—and also thank the residents of Chifley who participated in the trial. We have always been supportive of the target of no waste to landfill by 2010. This was initiated by the previous Liberal government and we are very supportive of it. It is quite a visionary target, as it highlights that, not only is it ideal, from a sustainability perspective, to have a waste-free society but that it is also possible for this to be achieved, in a foreseeable timeframe, if the political will is there.

26 June 2002

Previous attempts in Australia to set waste reduction targets have not been as bold, but the announcement of this target has inspired other governments to consider the possibility of eliminating all waste.

Of course, having a target and achieving it are two different things. The Greens have been concerned for some time that the previous Liberal government was not putting the effort that it should have into achieving this target. This was confirmed by a report of the Commissioner for the Environment in late 1999, who found that there was a lack of integration across government in the implementation of actions to help achieve the target, and that there was a need for a stronger whole-of-government commitment to achieving the target. I hope the Labor government takes on board these concerns, in determining future directions for waste management and reduction.

The closer we come to achieving the target, the harder it will become, as we will then have to deal with the most intractable forms of waste. Organic waste, however, can be readily recycled through composting. Some 23 per cent of the waste going to landfill is from household collections. The bio-bin study notes that the composition of household garbage bins includes 52 per cent of food and kitchen wastes. Getting this waste out of the landfill will make a significant contribution to the no waste target, as well as creating a source of compost to put back into gardens.

The study found that there was a decrease from 52 per cent food waste in bins, to an average of 20 per cent. This may not have been as successful as we would have liked. However, we need to acknowledge that this was only a trial, so commitment from residents was variable. For example, 10 per cent of residents in the area did not participate in the trial. I would expect a much higher rate of recycling if the scheme was ongoing and there was more education of residents as to the benefits of the new scheme.

I know there were a few problems with the trial, but the point of having a trial is to identify the problems and work out ways of overcoming them. Odour from the organic waste bins is a problem for some people. There was also a complaint that the change to a two-weekly collection of the residual bin was too infrequent. From the waste recycler's perspective, there was a problem with an increasing level of contamination in the organic waste as the trial went on. That may have been due to the knowledge that the trial was concluding. Again, if the scheme were ongoing, then the level of contamination would probably stabilise.

I note also that the bio-bins contained only about 10 to 15 per cent of kitchen waste and that residents dumped significant amounts of garden waste in the bins—primarily grass clippings and prunings. This indicates to me that the government should also look at the household collection of garden waste. There are three drop-off points for garden waste around Canberra, but these rely on residents being able to get their waste there. To me it would seem more efficient to have a coordinated system of household green waste collection, as well as providing greater incentives for residents to recycle garden waste.

I think the trial has shown that it is feasible to take organic waste out of the waste stream and have it recycled. There are a few implementation issues to be overcome, but I believe these can be resolved, with government commitment. I understand this issue is being taken up as part of a consideration of new household collection contracts.

I certainly encourage the government to use this opportunity to set up a permanent household organic waste collection scheme.

Having said that, I will speak to Ms Dundas' amendment. I am prepared to support the second part. It is implied anyway, but it clarifies that we want to see this across Canberra. We do not have a choice. If we want no waste by 2010, then we must deal with this issue.

I will not support the first part of Ms Dundas' amendment because I am not convinced that that is what we need to do. We do need to see the government pick this up in a proactive way, but not in the way Ms Dundas has suggested here.

I am a bit concerned. Mr Wood was not enthusiastic enough about what he would do with this next. I would like to put on the record now that, if we are serious about no waste, then we must continue doing this.

The amount of garden waste that was in there is something that certainly should be examined when we are looking at the whole issue of the collection of household waste. The questions of compost bins and the capacity of people in units to use them and so on are certainly not insurmountable problems.

Education is really important. Education is fundamental to the work of government because people do not necessarily understand the impact of household green waste on landfill. They do not understand the costs of landfill or the environmental implications of having to use more land for landfill. We, as an Assembly, need to recognise that environmental education is our responsibility and that it is not something we do which is then complete. We must not think, "We have done it." It must be ongoing, because the population changes. Obviously communities change. People's awareness needs to be expanded on an ongoing basis.

I look forward to seeing clear strategies from the government as to where they will move from this point. We have had the trial and it has pointed out some issues. Let us see how we can move on, taking those concerns into account.

**MS MacDONALD** (11.15): The Labor Party opposes the first part of Ms Dundas' amendment.

**MR SPEAKER:** You are closing the debate. I hope everybody understands that, Ms MacDonald.

**MS MacDONALD:** Yes, I am happy to close the debate, Mr Speaker. The Labor Party is opposing the first part of the amendment, but we are happy to support the second part. The reason I say that we oppose the first part is that, to implement bio-bins across Canberra would cost in the order of \$3 million. I ask Ms Dundas: if you are looking at us doing that, where would you like us to get the money from?

**Ms Dundas:** From tip fees!

26 June 2002

**MS MacDONALD:** Tip fees will not cover it, Ms Dundas.

The cost of a kitchen bin is \$2.20; the cost of an individual household bin is \$36.65, and the cost of a multi-unit bin is \$47.25. That is fairly expensive. We need to be continuing to push the gauntlet and say that we are aiming for no waste going to the tip by 2010. Whilst that is just around the corner, it is a very big corner. As Mr Hargreaves pointed out to me, it is only 7½ years away. I can say that, having spoken to ACT No Waste, they are confident that they will be able to achieve that by 2010, without introducing the third bin across Canberra.

I agree with Ms Tucker's assessment that we have set ourselves a bold target of achieving no waste by 2010. I believe other jurisdictions in the country look to Canberra as a leader in waste strategies. There are a number of jurisdictions around this country which have introduced a third bin for green waste. They have also, in the past, introduced such things as crates for bottles and paper, which were not sorted. Many of those trials have been unsuccessful. A lot of those were not trials. Councils around the country are now looking at having to replace methods they have previously utilised.

I would also agree with Ms Tucker that we need to find a more coordinated way of collecting green waste. As I said in my initial speech, at the moment, there is some 90,000 tonnes of garden waste being delivered to recycling services each year. That is by those people taking it there of their own accord—and through trash packs.

However, I would suggest that we need to find ways of letting people in the community know how they can get their green waste to the recycling services if they are not prepared to compost it all themselves, which is another method of reducing the waste.

In summary, Mr Speaker, I am pleased to have had all the support from previous speakers. I commend the motion to you, with the second part of Ms Dundas' amendment.

*Ordered that the amendments be put separately.*

Amendment No 1 negatived.

Amendment No 2 agreed to.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

## **O'Connell Centre**

**MR PRATT:** Pursuant to standing order 128, I fix the next day of sitting for the moving of this motion.

## East O'Malley—land auction

**MS TUCKER** (11.20): I move:

That this Assembly calls on the Government to:

- (1) cancel the proposed auction in August of land in East O'Malley for residential development;
- (2) defer any decision about the sale of any part of this land until:
  - (a) the Government has completed a review of Action Plan 10 for the protection of the declared endangered Yellow Box/Red Gum Grassy Woodland ecological community; and
  - (b) the Assembly has considered the outcome of this review.

Mr Speaker, east O'Malley is a wonderful piece of endangered yellow box/red gum grassy woodland. While many similar patches of woodland in the ACT have been bulldozed for farms or housing, this woodland's survival is probably due to the old quarry on Mugga Lane. When the NCDC developed O'Malley some 30 years ago it was decided not to develop land on the eastern edge of the new suburb because it was directly opposite the then working quarry on the other side of the valley. The land has, however, been zoned as residential for many years.

In the meantime, though, our understanding of ecology has expanded considerably, as has our impact on the environment. In 1997, yellow box/red gum grassy woodland was declared an endangered ecological community. Woodland was the characteristic vegetation covering 25 per cent of the Australian continent prior to European settlement. However, since then this woodland has been severely degraded because of clearing for farming activities. In south-east New South Wales there is only some 5 per cent of the original yellow box/red gum woodland left. The white box woodland had been practically wiped out.

Unfortunately, less than 1 per cent of the remaining woodland is protected across the region and in rural areas it is suffering from tree decline because of drought, fire, insect defoliation and limited opportunity for regeneration. Fortunately in the ACT there are some significant patches of remnant woodland, but there has been much fragmentation of the original woodland ecosystem because of clearing for farming and then urban development.

The action plan for grassy woodland states that only 25 per cent of good-quality remnant woodland remains in the ACT. The action plan identified all of the zoned residential area in east O'Malley as endangered woodland with about half of this land, the most easterly section that adjoins the Mount Mugga Mugga section of Canberra Nature Park, as very high conservation value. The rest of the land was identified as high conservation value.

The former Liberal government decided, however, to place only 40 per cent of this area into Canberra Nature Park and to allow residential development on the rest. The land was put on the 2001 land release program and a development control plan prepared last year for 122 dwellings. But, fortunately, the land got caught up in the public opposition to the Liberals' disastrous urban infill policy, so the sale did not proceed.

26 June 2002

Conservation groups put their faith in the ALP that it would reverse the Liberal push to develop this land. Before the election, the ALP, particularly Mr Corbell, made grand statements about the need to protect Canberra's open space. He even put up a motion in this Assembly to keep a similar but more degraded piece of woodland in north Watson as open space. The ALP said it would review the action plan for grassy woodland as there has been an ongoing debate over the ecological value of protecting degraded woodland—and in many woodland areas the trees are intact but the grassy understorey has been disturbed by grazing. The ALP also proposed a review of the adequacy of Canberra's open space system and entrenching its boundaries.

Unfortunately, after the election I and other members of the conservation group started getting mixed messages about what was happening in east O'Malley. We were told that the government was reviewing a proposed development. But then, last Saturday, a small advertisement appeared in the real estate section of the *Canberra Times* advertising east O'Malley for sale. What a cowardly way of announcing that this land was going to be developed. Here is the government that said in its budget yesterday that it wants the highest possible degree of community participation in decision-making, trying to slip through the sale of 27 hectares of land without anybody noticing. Well, the Greens certainly noticed and we will not let the government get away with this.

My motion today is about saving not a prime piece of real estate but a prime piece of endangered grassy woodland. I am very concerned that the government is proceeding with this sale before its promised review of the action plan for protecting grassy woodlands. There is a strong view within conservation circles that the O'Malley land has higher conservation value than some of the other protected woodlands in the ACT. While it is true that the area to be sold is smaller than the original development area, it has to be remembered that once you put in development there will be degradation of the woodland around the edge due to the impacts of weed infestation, domestic animals and general human activity, and I have had Mr Corbell acknowledge this in the past. Also things like clearing for fire control and putting in stormwater drainage channels et cetera will cut into woodland.

I want the sale of this land deferred until the review of Action Plan 10 relating to grassy woodland has been completed. The action plan was released in mid-1999. The plan itself says that it should be reviewed after three years, which means right now. I understand that the flora and fauna committee have scheduled this review for later this year because the review needs to include the results of field work undertaken during spring.

Selling off east O'Malley now will pre-empt the outcome of this review. It will be a betrayal of the trust that conservation groups put in the ALP and it will make a mockery of the whole system of protecting endangered ecosystems and of the government's plans to want to make the ACT sustainable. I should mention that local O'Malley residents are also concerned about the impacts of increased traffic through their residential streets, which they do not believe have been adequately addressed.

In conclusion, Mr Corbell has been quite inconsistent in supporting protection of north Watson but selling off east O'Malley, which has arguably better-quality woodland. He has a chance with this motion to make amends. There may be grounds for developing some of this land, but I think the government needs to just slow down and have a better look at the ecological value of the land.

**MS DUNDAS** (11.27): The Australian Democrats are happy to support this motion. We are disappointed that, as we understand from media reports, the rest of the Assembly will not join the crossbenches in supporting the east O'Malley woodlands.

Biodiversity continues to be eroded in Canberra by increasing development. Yellow box/red gum grassy woodland exists only in scattered areas of western ACT, and has been declared an endangered ecological community. A number of plant, bird and insect species associated with yellow box/red gum grassy woodland have also been declared as vulnerable to extinction or endangered in the ACT, including the button wrinklewort, the small purple pea, the hooded robin, the swift parrot, the superb parrot, the brown treecreeper, the painted honeyeater, the regent honeyeater and the perunga grasshopper.

The proposed east O'Malley estate is almost entirely situated on yellow box/red gum grassy woodland. While I see that the preliminary assessment notes that the areas of highest conservation value are preserved from development, the fact remains that this estate will destroy a large amount of this endangered ecosystem. Already we have removed 75 per cent of this ecological community from the ACT, and it is extremely irresponsible of this government to further erode the remaining patches.

Furthermore, Mr Speaker, the proposed development will not only remove sections of the woodland but further degrade the adjacent high-quality site. The extension of urban development is likely to increase the intrusion of exotic weeds and plants into the woodland as the borders are cultivated with foreign garden plants. The increase in domestic animals will also see increased pressures on native wildlife and the swelling of the nearby population will almost certainly increase human infringement on the woodlands for recreational use and further disrupt and impact on the natural ecosystem.

The government has announced a review of Action Plan No 10, which is designed to protect the yellow box/red gum grassy woodlands in the territory. Seeing that this land sale will directly affect areas considered by the action plan, it is obviously pre-emptive to begin any development on this site until the review that this government has initiated is actually completed.

My office has received a huge number of complaints from residents living in this area about both the impacts and design of the eastern O'Malley estate. It appears that this development hardly has overwhelming community support. I believe it is in the best interests of both our environmental heritage and retaining residential amenity to halt this land sell-off until Action Plan No 10 has been thoroughly reviewed and implemented.

**MR CORBELL** (Minister for Education, Youth and Family Services, Minister for Planning and Minister for Industrial Relations) (11.29): Ms Tucker has proposed that the auction of land in east O'Malley be cancelled and any decisions deferred to a future time. I would like to outline for members the lengthy and careful consideration that has led to the decision by the government to release this site.

I also want to indicate very clearly that I reject Ms Tucker's suggestion that this is in some way a cowardly move by the government. I doubt that you could accuse any government of being cowardly by advertising its intention to auction this site through the public notices of the *Canberra Times*. That is not the action of a government intent on

26 June 2002

hiding its decision because, quite clearly, once in the public notices of the *Canberra Times*, everyone who pays attention would be aware of it. Equally, the decision to release land in east O'Malley through advertisement is no different from the process undertaken in relation to the release of any other site in Canberra.

The Labor Party went to the previous election indicating that it would review the appropriateness of the release of sites such as east O'Malley in the context of a pending review of Action Plan 10, and that is what I, as Minister for Planning, did. In fact, I deliberately delayed the original release date for this site. I delayed the decision to go to auction of this site. This site was originally due to be auctioned much earlier this year.

I deliberately delayed that decision so that the government and I, as the responsible minister for the release of the site, could consider the issues raised by conservation groups and in the context of our commitment before the election to review the proposals to release such sites. That is what I did. I took detailed advice from Environment ACT, I met with the Friends of Grasslands about the issue and I spoke informally with a number of other people in the conservation movement in an attempt to make sure that I was properly informed about the range of issues. On balance, Mr Speaker, the government has taken a decision that, having reviewed the appropriateness of the release of this site, we still believe it should be released, and that resulted in the advertisement in last Saturday's *Canberra Times*.

The possible development of this land, as has been outlined by Ms Tucker, was first identified by the NCDC in 1976 as part of a structured plan for O'Malley, and this planning policy was incorporated into the Territory Plan when that took effect in 1993. The east O'Malley area of O'Malley was not developed at the time because, as Ms Tucker has indicated, noise and vibration impacts from the then operating quarry on Mount Mugga Mugga were of significant concern.

The release of this land has, of course, been forecast for some time. It was first flagged in the residential/commercial land release program for 1999/2000. It was noted that the east O'Malley site was subject to environmental planning and engineering assessment to determine its suitability for release. The environmental significance of this area has been considered as part of Action Plan 10 and parameters were proposed for residential development. Action Plan 10 saw approximately 42 hectares being excised from the residential land area and incorporated into the Mount Mugga Mugga reserve as part of Canberra Nature Park.

The studies into the development of the east O'Malley estate which were initiated under the previous government commenced in May last year, coordinated through Planning and Land Management. In addition to considering the environmental issues associated with the land, the studies looked at matters such as traffic, stormwater, sewer and impact on the surrounding area. These studies led to the preparation of a draft development control plan, which was distributed to the conservation council and all O'Malley households and discussed at a community forum held in late October 2000. A variety of concerns were raised as a result of this consultation, which resulted in further studies being initiated.

A decision was taken to review the area of land because of concerns raised about the impact of the development on the woodland area. The opportunity was also taken to look at the possible implementation of innovative urban stormwater initiatives in the estate. The main outcome of these studies was the former government's decision to reduce the total area set aside for residential development by a further nine hectares to approximately 27 hectares, of which two hectares was further set aside for urban open space. I have to stress that the urban open space elements were a result of the campaign the Labor Party ran in opposition that ensured that those areas were also set aside.

Mr Speaker, using the revised development control plan as the basis for the development of the estate, a preliminary assessment was prepared in accordance with the land act. The PA was released for public comment in August 2001 and evaluated by the delegate for the environment minister, who determined that no further environmental assessment was required.

The concerns associated with the development of this site have been taken into account. The DCP, the development control plan, represents a positive planning response to guide residential development, address the ecological values of the area and protect the adjoining nature reserve. You have got to remember that 70 per cent of the woodland area in east O'Malley is now to be incorporated into Canberra Nature Park. That is a significant area.

Mr Speaker, the development control plan outlines a range of measures. First of all, it will ensure that subdivision is of a high quality and all high-quality and high-plus-quality significant trees are to be retained; and all but two medium-quality significant trees are to be retained. There will be edge streets upon the boundary of the estate. This will provide for a clear buffer zone and management boundary and will avoid the problem we have experienced in other areas of interface between residential areas and Canberra Nature Park where back fences abut onto the reserve and the capacity for escape of introduced species of plants into the nature reserve area is much higher. So the introduction of the buffer streets will substantially eliminate those problems.

All residences will have a 5,000 litre rain water tank. There will be a demonstration street to promote the concepts of sustainable urban stormwater design. So the stormwater issues that Ms Tucker and Ms Dundas referred to are actually being substantially addressed through the subdivision design. This is not a standard subdivision in that regard. It is a high-quality stormwater approach, which builds a more sustainable approach to water management in the estate.

Silt fences will be installed on all blocks for the duration of building construction to prevent run-off from the estate during construction. All residents will be provided with information and an education program which details further measures they can take to achieve sustainable stormwater practices in the estate. And, importantly, the connectivity between Red Hill and Mount Mugga Mugga and onto Isaac Ridge—those areas of Canberra Nature Park—will be retained.

Mr Speaker, I would argue that those are high-quality outcomes for any residential estate in Canberra, and they are ones that we believe are appropriate. I understand the concerns from the conservation council, I understand the concerns from conservation groups, that this approach fails to recognise, in their view, the view that this is an ecological

26 June 2002

community and any part of this ecological community should not be proposed for development at this stage.

What I say in response to that is the government has adhered to its commitment. Its election commitment was to review the appropriateness of the release of these sites in the context of the review of Action Plan 10. The detailed advice that I received from Environment ACT indicated that the review of Action Plan 10 was unlikely to result in a decision to not proceed with the release of this site. In that context, in the context of the broader demands faced for land release in the territory, and given the significant amount of land already protected—70 per cent of the original residential area being protected—in the Canberra Nature Park, the government, on balance, believes that it was an appropriate decision.

The government is seeking a strategic and holistic approach to the protection of endangered species and communities in order to achieve more significant conservation outcomes. My colleague, Mr Wood, will outline briefly the work that is being undertaken to build a sustainable and strategic framework for the protection of this endangered woodland area, including significant sites in north Canberra.

**MR WOOD** (Minister for Urban Services and Minister for the Arts) (11.40): Mr Speaker, I join with Mr Corbell in debating this very serious and important motion that has been moved by Ms Tucker. Ms Tucker has called for any decision about the sale of this land to be deferred until the government has completed a review of Action Plan 10 for the protection of the declared endangered yellow box/red gum grassy woodland ecological community. I will point out shortly that we are observing Action Plan 10 and that maybe we have got different ideas about what is meant by a review of Action Plan 10.

But first, let me describe the significance of these woodlands in the broader context of sustainable nature conservation in the ACT. We recognise the need to take a more strategic approach to the conservation of endangered species and ecological communities, including yellow box/red gum grassy woodlands. The sustainable bush capital we want requires a concerted effort of managing our natural areas strategically. We need to meet the conservation requirements of species and communities that are threatened with extinction, while at the same time ensuring that those that are in good condition remain so. This important task needs a well planned allocation of conservation effort.

A key element of such a strategy is a regional approach to the identification and management of conservation threats, with local targeting of issues of special concern. The required management resources can then be assigned strategically so that the conservation benefits are maximised.

Ecological evaluation of grassy woodland areas at Gooroo (east Gungahlin), Callum Brae (Symonston) and Kinlyside (east of Hall) has confirmed their importance to the long-term conservation of the yellow box/red gum grassy woodland endangered ecological community. Protecting the yellow box woodlands at these sites as part of a strategic conservation program will achieve much more significant conservation outcomes than something like 25 hectares at east O'Malley. Protecting woodland in the areas I have mentioned will preserve wildlife links between existing reserves and

maintain areas of a size and ecological diversity essential to retain the birds and other animals typical of that sort of woodland.

The proposed development at east O'Malley was the subject of a thorough examination in the preliminary assessment undertaken during 2001. The preliminary assessment noted the existence of other extensive areas of yellow box woodland elsewhere in the territory. The government is now looking to ensure that the contribution these areas can make at the regional conservation scale is fully considered during the preparation of the spatial plan for Canberra.

The woodland at east O'Malley was identified in Action Plan 10 as one of several areas warranting further study. And that happened, Ms Tucker—that further study happened. It occurred. The action plan was followed. This was carried out as part of the preliminary assessment and detailed design work for the proposed development. As Mr Corbell has indicated, as a result of the extra study, the area of woodland to be protected was increased by nine hectares. Of the 89 hectares originally shown in the Territory Plan for urban expansion at O'Malley, 62 hectares, or 70 per cent of the area, is to be added to the Mount Mugga Mugga Nature Reserve. A further two hectares is to be retained as urban open space connecting the reserve to the existing hilltop open space park.

I come to my point, Ms Tucker, about your perception of what the review of this action plan means. We don't all have the same perception of what is meant by a review. The review is intended to see how we are progressing, how we are implementing the action plan, how that is done. It doesn't take us right back to taws, to start all over again. We are doing that. We assessed the implementation and, as required in that action plan, the woodland at east O'Malley received further study. The action plan was followed—east O'Malley was reviewed. And while this is happening, this whole action plan—the whole lot of it—is going to be looked at. We will be asking, “Is this working? Are we implementing this well enough? Are we doing those points well enough? Are these concepts right?” That is the review. It is not to say that we have to go back and review east O'Malley again.

We implemented this part of this action plan and I think when the review is received in something like four to six months it will probably, if it attends to it, say the process at east O'Malley was well done—it was done thoroughly, it was done carefully and it was done in accordance with the action plan. So just understand what is meant by a review of Action Plan 10. I have explained what that means. Bear in mind that that is what that review was about. I hope I can allay any concerns—and I understand those concerns—that some people might have.

The land to be protected at east O'Malley fulfils the commitment in Action Plan 10 to review the most appropriate boundary for residential development adjacent to O'Malley. As a result of all that planning and following the action plan, the commitments in Action Plan 10 have been met and the area of yellow box woodland to be protected is 20 hectares larger than the 42 hectares originally provided for in Action Plan 10.

Action Plan 10, at page 20, puts forward a proposal to protect a certain area, and the review increased the area to be protected. So I think that things have been done properly and I do think there is a bit of a misunderstanding of terminology. The proposed development will maintain existing ecological connectivity and animal movement

26 June 2002

between the Red Hill Nature Reserve and Isaacs Ridge, and the Callum Brae woodlands to the south.

Mr Speaker, for the information of members, I should point out that the real estate development will include several water sensitive urban design initiatives, including the construction of a pond and creek rehabilitation works, flush kerbs and swales. Mr Corbell has also mentioned some of those aspects. In addition, 99 per cent of medium, high and very high-quality eucalypt trees within the development area are to be retained as a requirement of the deed of agreement—that is, just one of the 136 significant trees on the land in question will be lost.

Mr Speaker, I should mention that there are some other related issues. The perunga grasshopper has been raised as an issue of concern to some people. This species is typically found in native grasslands, so east O'Malley is not considered to be significant habitat or sole habitat for these species. It is already found in grassland nature reserves and other significant grassland areas which are not to be developed. Another issue is that of the speckled warbler. This is a declining species that is best protected by conserving large areas of yellow box and other woodlands, such as those sites I have mentioned.

The final issue concerns the review of the implementation of action plans—I am really stressing this point because I think it is the core of this matter—which is part of a routine annual assessment process undertaken by the flora and fauna committee. I would like the Assembly to note that the current development proposal already delivers a greater area at east O'Malley than was provided for.

Mr Corbell has outlined all the significant issues. We are concerned. We are proud of our green credentials. We well know that this Assembly is very insistent on protection of our environment and I believe we have been doing just that.

**MRS DUNNE (11.49):** Mr Speaker, I rise to speak against the motion. When this motion was brought to my attention earlier this week I undertook that the Liberal Party room would look at it closely. To that end I sought and obtained, thanks to the ministers, a very comprehensive briefing from the land and property section as well as the wildlife research group. I hope that Ms Tucker also availed herself of the opportunity to have a briefing because the briefing I was given clarified some of the points that were milling around in the back of my mind. It indicated what a high-quality and thoughtful process this has been to bring together what will be a very high-quality development which is entirely sensitive to the adjoining areas.

As the ministers have explained in great detail, this is an issue that has been around for a long time. In fact, my first recollection of this as an issue was back in 1997 when I was a humble environment adviser to the then minister for the environment. Members of the wildlife research unit came to me and said that this was an area that would have to be considered under what was then a draft action plan. From that time there was encouragement from the then government, which continued through the custodianship of Mr Humphries and then Mr Smyth, to ensure that substantial areas of east O'Malley would eventually become included in Canberra Nature Park, which is still subject to draft variation.

I have to concur with everything that Mr Wood said about the review of the action plan and how it is quite separate from the review process that went on to determine how much land at east O'Malley should eventually be released. We know that the review of the action plan is part of a three-year rolling program that the fauna and flora committee undertakes. It would be quite remiss to use this motion as an opportunity to go back to taws and reassess whether or not more land at O'Malley needs to be excluded.

As we have heard, of the original 89 hectares of east O'Malley shown on the Territory Plan as residential, 70 per cent has been excised because of its high quality. The area that remains is in many ways degraded. It has a considerable cover of weeds and lots of tracks go through it. The whole process is a testament to the commitment of the people on this side of the house to the maintenance of the action plan for the red box/yellow gum grassy woodland endangered areas—and, as well as Mr Wood, I can say that in one breath.

The motion that Ms Tucker has moved today is entirely unacceptable because what it would do is create a needless delay of six months or probably a year in the release of this land. In many ways, this is badly needed land that should have been released some time ago. Members on this side have been adamant about this. They have been at great pains to make sure that the Minister for Planning fulfils his responsibilities in respect of the land release program, and it has been delayed unduly already.

Going to some of the substantive issues addressed by Ms Tucker, if Ms Tucker had availed herself of the briefing that I received yesterday from the land section, the wildlife research unit and the consultant who is doing the stormwater, she would have seen what a fine development and what a great way forward this can be. The stormwater proposals for this development are not your ordinary stormwater works. This is best practice. This is state-of-the-art stuff.

As I was saying briefly yesterday, when I first became involved in Landcare, probably in the mid-90s, and we were talking about issues relating to river flows and things like that, the stormwater people came and said, "Our job in stormwater is to get as much water off the land as possible into drains and into creeks as quickly as possible, otherwise people might drown." We have had a complete turnaround in that approach by stormwater engineers, to the situation today where this project will be looking at innovative ways of keeping most of the water on the blocks for as long as possible. It means that you increase recharge and the area gets the water that it would normally get before it was built on. This is innovative stuff and it should be encouraged. The previous government instituted this practice and I am pleased to see that it has been continued by the present minister.

People are being shown how this sort of high-quality, upmarket development can be implemented. This sort of approach is more appealing in a way in that if it is used in respect of top-of-the-range developments, then people down the greasy pole will say, "Well, yes, we want that as well for our developments." Over time we will see a turnaround in the way we deal with stormwater, and this will be to the benefit of the whole environment. As the minister has said, silt fencing will be used in the estate.

Going to some of the other substantive issues: Ms Tucker talked about weed infestations. She raised issues relating to bush fires, one of which was fire clearing. One of the innovations is edge roads. In many cases I have been critical of the use of edge roads in developments, but here I am completely in support of it because the edge road is one way of creating a barrier that limits the possibility of weed infestation. You do not have people backing onto the reserve and throwing their grass clippings over the reserve or allowing their plantings to extend into the reserve. The edge road provides that barrier. It also provides a barrier for bush fire fighting. Generally speaking, fire issues will be probably adequately addressed by the edge road, particularly where land slopes away from the direction of prevailing winds in summertime.

In addition, the ministers talked about the connectivity between Red Hill and the very high-quality red gum/yellow box grassy woodland at Callum Brae, which is some 340 hectares—I can't remember the exact figure off the top of my head—compared to the 62 hectares in O'Malley.

So in summary, Mr Speaker, the members of the opposition oppose Ms Tucker's motion. We feel that it is not sufficiently thought out and that it is really a delaying tactic, an issue of political grandstanding and simply anti-development.

**MS TUCKER** (11.54), in reply: I will close the debate and respond to some of the points that have been made. First of all, I will respond to what was said by Mr Corbell.

Mr Corbell was offended that I suggested that it was cowardly to make the announcement just in the newspaper. He said that this was the normal process. But Mr Corbell is very well aware of the fact that this issue has been discussed and debated since well before the election. A lot of people have expressed views to the previous minister and to the current minister that there is high interest in what the government of the day has decided. This is the government that was claiming to be interested in respecting community input. There is no way anybody could say that not letting people know what a decision is and why it was made is respectful of input. So, I am sorry, I cannot accept his response at all. If he didn't want to put out a press release, at the very least Mr Corbell should have spoken to those groups who have put in so much work and time with various governments on this area of such high ecological importance.

We have been assured that the government has looked at the relevant issues for east O'Malley. Language such as "on balance" was used. Mr Wood, I think, and Mr Corbell, perhaps, put the position that we have a different understanding of what the process should be; that we don't really quite understand what is involved in the review of Action Plan No 10. I understood Mr Wood to say—and please correct me if I am wrong—that a review of east O'Malley has been done and that the result of that study led the government to the position it has taken. I would like that review to be tabled here today—now, if possible, but by close of business today would be great—because it would help us understand why members of the community, including those who obviously have had no part in it, feel so betrayed by the process that has occurred. Apparently that little discrete review of east O'Malley that you claim to have done is of such strength that it does not have to be included within the context of the broader review of Action Plan 10 which, as I recall, was a fairly seriously big election commitment by Labor.

The view of the community was clearly put that the current Action Plan 10 is more an action plan for development. There are very broad concerns about this. This review is necessary. As I said, the review has not been completed because surveys which are designed to inform the action plan are to be conducted in spring.

If I understood correctly—and, again, please correct me if I am wrong—Mr Corbell or Mr Wood seemed to be saying that they have been informed that we don't need to wait for this review of Action Plan 10 because Environment ACT, I think it was, or maybe the land release people, have said that they know the outcome of this review will be such that this development could occur anyway.

**Mr Corbell:** Kerrie, if you want a briefing, why don't you just ask for one?

**MS TUCKER:** So Mr Corbell is—

**Mr Corbell:** Just ask for a briefing.

**MS TUCKER:** I am quite happy for Mr Corbell to speak again if he likes. But the point I am making is that Mr Corbell has said that he is prepared to pre-empt this process. He is prepared to pre-empt this process for reasons which he has not explained to this place, and that is absolutely unacceptable, particularly considering the statements he made to the community before the election. He sounds exactly like the Liberal minister sounded before the election. That is why people feel so betrayed by the position taken by the Labor Party. Anything that the Liberals have said today is no surprise. We expect that.

The argument has been put up that this is a water sensitive urban design. Great. The Greens have quite a good record on supporting water sensitive urban design. We would like to see it in Kingston foreshore, Mrs Dunne. Mrs Dunne said there have been opportunities to have a demonstration project—opportunities which her government totally failed to take up. You cannot argue with any credibility that because this urban development is water sensitive it is okay to take away one of the most endangered ecosystems in our region.

Mr Wood talked in his speech about regional responsibilities. That is exactly one of the key arguments about the endangered grassy woodlands, and he is well aware of that. The argument that somehow this little bit is not going to matter has no credibility at all, and I think they must realise that. It should be clear to members, but apparently it is not, that this area is an important remnant woodland area. It is one of the largest remnant areas left in the ACT.

Mr Corbell, I think, or Mr Wood, spoke about how we can maintain large trees within the development. I have heard Mr Corbell agree with people at rallies at north Watson. When Mr Smyth was pushing that line, Mr Corbell was saying, "We know that does not work." When you look at the integrity of a grassy woodland, you know very well that it is not just about trees that are standing. It is about fallen trees as well; it is about the ecological value of timber on the ground. In pre-empting the review of Action Plan 10 he is arguing that we can maintain trees in this development and somehow maintain ecological integrity, that the ecological integrity issues will be dealt with by water sensitive design, and that somehow a balance has been reached.

26 June 2002

As I said, I am looking forward to seeing, I hope today, the discrete review of east O'Malley. An understanding and knowledge have obviously been discretely arrived at without consultation taking place with the broader community, and maybe not involving the flora and fauna committee, who seem to be out of the loop in this as well. So basically what we have ended up with is a situation—

**Mr Corbell:** Why are you afraid of asking for a briefing?

**MS TUCKER:** You know that when Mr Corbell interjects a lot he is getting upset. The point is that what we have here is a situation where Labor in government is mimicking the Liberals when they were in government, and they will be condemned for that by the community.

Question put:

That **Ms Tucker's** motion be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes, 2		Noes, 13	
Ms Dundas	Ms Tucker	Mr Berry	Ms MacDonald
		Mr Corbell	Mr Pratt
		Mr Cornwell	Mr Quinlan
		Mrs Dunne	Mr Smyth
		Ms Gallagher	Mr Stefaniak
		Mr Hargreaves	Mr Wood
		Mr Humphries	

Question so resolved in the negative.

## **Brindabella—election commitments**

**MR HARGREAVES** (12.10): Mr Speaker, I move:

That this Assembly:

- (1) recognises the strong endorsement given to the Stanhope Labor Government by the electorate of Brindabella at the 2001 Legislative Assembly election.
- (2) notes the Government's commitment to deliver on the agenda it promised Brindabella residents at the election.
- (3) welcomes the early delivery of election commitments such as:
  - (a) investing in Brindabella schools via the abolition of the \$27 million free bus travel scheme;
  - (b) establishing the Affordable Housing Task Force;
  - (c) funding major public infrastructure projects in Brindabella;
  - (d) opening the new child and youth dental facility in Tuggeranong;
  - (e) developing sustainable public transport options for Brindabella residents;
  - (f) creating additional police positions;
  - (g) committing more field staff in Brindabella parks and reserves; and
  - (h) establishing the solar water rebate scheme.

Mr Speaker, I want to just address some of the movements in services and facilities which have occurred in the electorate of Brindabella over the past eight months. It is important to note the significance of the result for the Stanhope government in the electorate of Brindabella at the 2001 Legislative Assembly election. It is against this backdrop that we need to consider the content of the motion.

The ALP vote in Brindabella is the highest any party has achieved in the history of self-government in the ACT. At 43.97 per cent, it easily exceeds the 42.85 per cent the Liberals achieved in Molonglo in 1995 in the heyday of Mrs Bruce Stadium herself. It is the first time in the history of self-government in the ACT that an electorate has returned a majority of seats to a party. It also represented a massive swing to the ALP of 15.5 per cent from the 1998 result.

**Ms Tucker:** You just lost a lot then, mate.

**MR HARGREAVES:** I have to say, Ms Tucker, that I am happy to laugh along with other people. I didn't hear what you said either but the look on your face is worth a laugh. Mr Speaker, the Liberal vote in Brindabella in 2001—

**MR SPEAKER:** Mr Hargreaves, the air may be thick with sharpened barbs but it is disorderly to respond to them.

**MR HARGREAVES:** They are little love arrows, Mr Speaker. The Liberal vote in Brindabella in 2001 was only 31.86 per cent—31.86 per cent against 43.97 per cent; a great achievement to the Liberals!

Mr Speaker, this government has delivered on its promises to the people of Brindabella. The government has expressed its determination to deliver on the promises it made during last year's election campaign. Labor went to the election last October with a program that was clearly spelt out and fully costed. I know this is prickling the Deputy Leader of the Opposition but you can't help bad luck. Canberrans knew what they were voting for and now Labor is delivering on that program. We have been in government for just over eight months and the record shows that we are well advanced in putting our commitments in place.

Mr Speaker, education is a key priority for the government. We have honoured our commitment to provide an extra \$27 million in education funding over the next four years. You will remember, Mr Speaker, pushing this very hard and very long within the caucus and it must give you some pleasure to see it manifested in the budget documents.

**Mr Wood:** He is impartial.

**MR HARGREAVES:** Indeed. He is now, but he was not then. As the minister, Mr Corbell has said, "Investment in education is the best means of securing jobs for our children and ensuring a solid future for the ACT."

The government's priorities in education include reducing class sizes, IT development, increased support for students at risk and support for indigenous students. Brindabella schools will benefit immediately from this government's proactive investment in the fabric of the schools environment. Specific initiatives include: reduction in year 3 class

26 June 2002

sizes; funding for high school development; the laptops for teachers program, promised but not delivered but now delivered by Labor; students pathway initiatives; enhanced indigenous support program—contrast that with the removal of an indigenous teacher in the Liberal regime in 1996; and schools IT capacity upgrade.

Mr Speaker, we are also looking at implications for Brindabella regarding the affordable housing task force. One of the government's highest priorities is to address the shortage of affordable housing. To this end, the government established the affordable housing task force to make recommendations for an affordable housing strategy. I know that Mr Wood has been pushing this initiative for some time and I have to say it is of immense pleasure to find that a member for Brindabella is the minister for housing, because we do have that sympathetic ear.

The ACT is currently experiencing one of the lowest vacancy rates in the private rental market in recent history and there is growing evidence that the number of households in housing stress in our community is increasing. The task force will consult widely with the ACT community in the course of its investigations and will develop broad-based strategies for increasing housing affordability, taking into account financial, land use, planning, taxation and other considerations, as well as the role of both the social and private housing sectors.

I note, and *Hansard* should record, that the empty opposition bench we are now seeing reflects the contribution of opposition members. This strategy will define the nature of affordable housing.

**Ms MacDonald:** There is now one.

**MR HARGREAVES:** Correct, Ms MacDonald. The collective contribution of the opposition at the moment is one. One opposition member for Brindabella in fact is sitting opposite; the other one is lounging at the other end of the room.

The strategy will also identify the factors, extent and incidence of housing stress and lack of housing affordability overall within the ACT community. It will identify and assess opportunities and constraints for the development of affordable housing in the ACT; identify strategies used to increase housing affordability in other jurisdictions in Australia and overseas, and assess their appropriateness in the ACT context; and, finally, develop broadly based strategies for increasing housing affordability, taking into account, as I said, financial, land use, planning, taxation and other considerations as well as the role of both the social and private housing sectors.

Mr Speaker, in Brindabella this time, instead of the long awaited "let's look into it and see what we can do" policy of the Liberals, we have seen the emergence of major infrastructure projects and real-time cash in the budget for them. The government is committed to major infrastructure projects and upgrades to essential services and facilities in the Brindabella electorate.

**Mr Smyth:** Ha, ha!

**MR HARGREAVES:** I think the Deputy Leader of the Opposition ought to catch an ACTION bus into work so that he can calm down on the trip. Capital works funding would be spent on constructing and upgrading important community facilities in priority areas of health, education, roads and community safety.

Major features of the program will include the Drakeford Drive duplication. The Deputy Leader of the Opposition says, "Good on you blokes for doing something we were going to do." Well these people were going to do it for six years. People are born, live their lives and die in the time it takes you people to do anything.

Mr Speaker, I am particularly pleased that the government has announced funding for the long awaited Drakeford Drive duplication. Brindabella residents waited and waited for the previous government to do something—apart from spending \$800,000 in trying to fix up one intersection, which I don't think was all that successful but it was a good try.

This government has allocated \$4.3 million for the duplication of the road between Erindale Drive and Isabella Drive. The project is part of the government's road safety and congestion program and the section between Erindale Drive and Isabella Drive is the last section of Drakeford Drive to be duplicated. Of course, once all that has been done we can start to pay some attention to that part of Drakeford Drive which is actually known as Tharwa Drive, because I think that will complete the duplication of virtually the trip from Holt through to Tharwa—or to the gates of Lanyon homestead at Tharwa. This project will reduce traffic congestion in the area and improve traffic flow to the Tuggeranong town centre. The previous Liberal government talked about this for six years and the Labor government took six months to do something about it.

Mr Speaker, this government has actually put some money into the Chisholm Oval upgrade. Improvements to the oval will include the construction of a new pavilion for spectators and players, a new turf wicket, enhanced training facilities and a picket boundary fence. The project is a partnership with the Tuggeranong Valley Cricket Club and the Tuggeranong Valley Rugby Union and Amateur Sports Club. I am pleased that the government has committed significant funds to the project. The upgrade will not only enhance Tuggeranong's reputation for being the home of cricket development in the ACT but it will be welcome news to the many sports people who use this popular oval in the heart of the valley. I look forward to Mr Smyth bagging that one, given his former address was in Chisholm.

Mr Speaker, the government is pleased to put some money into, and more importantly its own weight behind, the Woden to Downer cycle path. Construction of an on-road cycling lane from Woden to Dickson is great news for cyclists in Brindabella who commute to work in the city. I know of one such mad person. This project is an important part of the government's policy to promote sustainable transport options, is a more direct route for cyclists and improves safety. It is a shame that the conservation council have gone because they were really keen to see this happen. The first stage of work is expected to include Adelaide Avenue/Yarra Glen and Commonwealth Avenue north of Commonwealth Avenue Bridge to London Circuit. As part of the project, some existing and unused cycleways will be upgraded and linked.

26 June 2002

Mr Speaker, we need high-quality facilities and infrastructure in order to provide high-quality services to the people of Brindabella. “What about the kids,” Mr Speaker, “I hear you ask loudly?”

**MR SPEAKER:** It wasn't me.

**MR HARGREAVES:** It wasn't you—it must have been Mr Smyth. “What about the kids,” I hear you ask. Well, funny you should ask.

**Mr Smyth:** Perhaps it's the empty hollow echoing in your mind.

**MR HARGREAVES:** Sorry, your place has been taken by a person who is much younger than you are.

The Chief Minister opened a new child and youth dental health clinic in the Tuggeranong Health Centre in May. The clinic is part of ACT Community Care's expanding network of community health facilities.

**Mr Smyth:** Who funded it and who started it?

**MR HARGREAVES:** Here we go again, Mr Speaker—“We started it, you finished it.” Well, you started the Bruce Stadium but we finished that as well. You started Hall/Kinlyside and we finished that. Do you want me to keep going or is it too embarrassing for you?

**Mr Smyth:** No. Keep going, keep going.

**MR HARGREAVES:** You started the election and we finished that.

**Mr Smyth:** Keep going, keep going.

**MR HARGREAVES:** One of these days you will get used to being the opposition. You might as well—you are going to be there for a fair while.

The clinic has been extended to include three additional surgeries and has an extensive range of new equipment, including six high-quality chairs with a full complement of operating equipment. ACT Community Care's dental health program provides services to promote good oral health through a targeted health promotion strategy, as well as assessment and treatment of existing dental problems. “Good move, good move government,” I say.

Mr Speaker, the government has acted on its commitment to improve public transport in the ACT by announcing a \$46.8 million increase in funding for ACTION over five years. Public transport is critically important to Canberra's social and economic future, and the Stanhope government is committed to getting people out of cars and onto public transport in any of its forms.

Public transport policies and funding are a priority issue for this government. We are working on improving the mobility of the public to use sustainable public transport systems. I heard another sling from across the chamber, but I have to say that the last

time I was on a bus Mr Smyth hadn't been heard of. In fact, I was thinking about sending him a bus timetable because I am sure one goes somewhere near his house.

The government has listened to the people of Canberra and has now delivered a flat fare system for all of Canberra to commence 1 July 2002. ACTION's *One Fare—Anywhere* delivers travel that is equitable, sustainable and affordable for all ACT residents. Multi-zone customers, who make up the majority of ACTION patrons in Brindabella, will benefit considerably with savings of between 35 and 46 per cent. For example, Tuggeranong to city commuters will save \$55.50 a month. That is, a monthly ticket will now cost only \$80.50 instead of the old price of \$136. Brindabella residents will now be able to travel anywhere in Canberra within the hour for only \$2.40 or less for concession tickets.

Mr Speaker, the Stanhope government is supporting appropriate funding to ACTION to allow the continuation of current service levels. This range of initiatives demonstrates the ACT government's commitment to public transport and our goal of attracting more Canberrans to use ACTION.

The government has announced additional police positions in line with our election commitment. These positions will be targeted to specific needs and designed to deliver a maximum impact in the fight against crime in our community, and this something that is very dear to the heart of many people in Brindabella.

Putting additional field staff into our parks and reserves is a feature of the government's *A Sustainable Bush Capital in the New Millennium—a New Focus for Nature Conservation in the ACT*. This is going to be done through: recruitment of additional personnel to meet seasonal work demands; rearrangement of administrative responsibilities to release qualified staff for field duties; new roster arrangements to allow greater field presence during peak use periods; and provision of additional equipment. The government's nature conservation plans focuses on four key challenges, including obviously putting more field staff into the ACT parks and reserves.

The ACT government has committed \$1.1 million over three years to the solar hot water scheme and expects 1,500 households to benefit. That should be up and running—and if my memory serves me correctly, the minister spoke about this earlier on in the day.

Mr Speaker, the people of Brindabella put their trust in the Stanhope government to deliver on its election promises. I am pleased to be able to report to the Assembly that we have kept our word. Ms MacDonald, Mr Wood and I are proud to represent the people of Brindabella in the government. We have demonstrated our commitment to the electorate in the first eight months of this fifth Assembly, and we will keep on working for Brindabella long into the future.

**MS DUNDAS (12.25):** I rise to speak only very briefly on this motion, and I will be speaking briefly because I believe private members business should be used for more productive matters than a motion from a government backbencher congratulating the government.

26 June 2002

I believe that Mr Hargreaves has not given us the full story of what is going on in Brindabella. Almost 25 per cent of the people in Brindabella did not vote Labor or Liberal. One in four chose something else.

I believe that Mr Hargreaves left a few things off his list that perhaps the community of Brindabella would not welcome. Are the people of Brindabella welcoming of the ALP election commitment concerning neighbouring planning groups that will be concentrated in the inner north or inner south over the next three years? Perhaps only at some time in the far-off future will neighbourhood planning groups ever reach Brindabella. And the people of Brindabella cannot welcome the funding for an upgrade of the Lanyon skate park, because there isn't any.

In short, the budget released yesterday will see Brindabella residents, like the residents of my electorate of Ginninderra, forking out more money in parking fees, and thousands more in other charges, yet they will not be getting the quality or the quantity of services provided by this government to central Canberra residents. We will be paying more for registration and getting nice new buses, but we won't be able to travel into the city at night or have more services on peak routes in and out of Brindabella.

Mr Hargreaves mentioned the affordable housing taskforce as a win, and yes there is some money in the budget for that. But why then is the government slugging home owners with an increase in conveyancing duties and increases in land tax?

The government is providing no relief for private or public renters. Although there is the establishment of a Lifeline referral hotline—and I believe this is a wonderful initiative—where are people going to be referred to, as available beds in crisis accommodation are non-existent?

The government, as Mr Hargreaves has mentioned, has a solar water rebate scheme, but perhaps more useful to the people of the Tuggeranong Valley and Brindabella would be what is occurring in other councils—a buyback scheme for wood heaters that would help curb the smog that sits in the valley during winter. The people of Brindabella deserve much better from a member than a self-congratulatory motion.

*Debate interrupted in accordance with standing order 74 and the resumption of the debate made an order of the day for a later hour.*

**Sitting suspended from 12.28 to 2.30 pm.**

## **Questions without notice**

### **Cost of land development**

**MR HUMPHRIES:** Mr Speaker, my question is to the Treasurer, Mr Quinlan. In your budgetary speech yesterday, Treasurer, you forecast that the government would incur an operating loss of \$20.6 million in the 2003-04 financial year, which you attribute to the ACT government developing land itself rather than having the private sector do it. You anticipate that this system will lead to greater revenue returns in subsequent years.

According to the Civic Advance Trends Bulletin of March 1988, the federal Labor government of the day decided to privatise land development in the 1987-88 budget after it lost \$15.9 million in 1985-86 and \$48.5 million in 1986-87 on land development. Why do you anticipate that this current ACT Labor government will be able to manage land development better now than the federal Labor government was able to in the 1980s?

**MR QUINLAN:** Let me assure the Assembly. What you will have observed in the budget is that we enter this process in the 2003-2004 financial year. We do so at that time because we want to make sure that we do this in a measured and studied fashion. The transition that will take place will involve, still, some greenfields sales, some joint venture operation and some actual public sector development, so we won't be putting all our eggs in one basket overnight; we will be doing it in a business fashion.

And let me report to you this: I don't know exactly what windfall gains have accrued to developers in recent days, but certainly some of the larger building contractors and developers in town have given me their opinion that it is something that we ought look at. Generally, there's not an overwhelming support, let me say, in the building industry for public sector development, but for joint venture and for the inclusion in the process of more contractors than there have been in the past, rather than just one or two monopolising and dominating the area. That particular sentiment is coming through.

So I believe it is going to take good, sound business management, and I am certainly looking forward to this government being re-elected so that we can continue the process of good, sound management beyond this Assembly so that we can actually make this thing work, and ensure that in fact the asset that is the territory's, that belongs to the people of the ACT, is used to the maximum benefit of the people of the ACT.

**MR HUMPHRIES:** I ask a supplementary question. Are you saying, Treasurer, that what you've got that the federal Labor government didn't have is good, sound business management? Did your government undertake rigorous financial analysis of this proposal before you made an in-principle decision to go down this path and, if so, will you table that financial analysis in this place?

**MR QUINLAN:** The answer to the first question is: you betcha. And let me tell you that the people in Treasury have looked at this from every direction, have they not, Mr Corbell?

**Mr Corbell:** Rigorously.

**MR QUINLAN:** Quite rigorously examined it. Secondly, it is most unfortunate but I do believe—and I'm not absolutely certain—that the papers were cabinet papers anyway. But I would be disinclined to be tabling our own workings on a regular basis anyway, so that it could be, you know, pored over and picked at down to single numbers. But let me assure you, Mr Humphries, the Treasury people, some of whom will be sitting outside in the anteroom, really went over this one.

26 June 2002

## 2002-2003 budget

**MR HARGREAVES:** My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, firstly congratulations on presenting your first budget in this place yesterday.

**Mr Quinlan:** Thank you.

**MR HARGREAVES:** Oh, it's hard to be humble. Treasurer, in the Leader of the Opposition's lazy response to the budget yesterday, Mr Humphries labelled it a typical Labor budget because it's a "high taxing, high spending government". How do you respond to these claims?

**MR QUINLAN:** Do you think I should say "you betcha" to this one? No, sorry. Thank you, Mr Hargreaves, for the question.

**Mr Cornwell:** I hope you're not expressing an opinion, Mr Treasurer.

**MR QUINLAN:** I will try to avoid having an opinion at all, Mr Cornwell. In Budget Paper No 3, where we have the financial statements for this particular budget, members will observe that the expenditure line increases only very marginally from the expected outcome for the current financial year. And in fact if you look at the—

**Mr Humphries:** That's because you've added to them, with two appropriation bills.

**MR QUINLAN:** If you look at *Budget at a glance*, you will see that the expenditure for the coming year increases by 0.3 per cent over the expected expenditure for the current year. Now, to be fair, we have to concede that this government did bring down a couple of appropriation bills.

**Mr Humphries:** Yes, indeed.

**MR QUINLAN:** We certainly did. And I've been through that. Now, not all of the content of those appropriation bills is attributable to initiatives of the incoming government. Rather they pick up on those things that in large part the Humphries government had already committed to: expenditure on Kendell Airlines, the SACS award, the nurses EBA, which was inevitable, and the AFP EBA, which was effectively settled.

In fact, on the most objective analysis that I could bring to this, of the \$51 million that we actually appropriated in bills 2 and 3, I'll cop \$16 million as being attributable to us. And that \$16 million also includes the \$8.7 million for the hospital, which I think Mr Smyth was baying for on the day of the election—"Haven't they done it yet?" It was the night of the election: "They're elected—where's the money at the hospital?"

If you take that into account and therefore you draw back and say, "Well, in that case, what is the expected expenditure attributable to the budget of the current financial year," you would get about \$2,175,000,000. And that is about 1 per cent lower than the expenditure predicted for next year.

Now, given that we have a 2.5 per cent CPI, in real terms the expenditure for this budget will be lower than the expenditure that is attributable to the Humphries budget of last year.

**Mr Humphries:** It's \$116 million worth of initiatives, on your figures.

**MR QUINLAN:** Now, okay, to be fair, there are always some accounting puts and takes, and I guess that brings me to the point: you take those raw figures, as Mr Humphries has done, and say, "A high spending government. They have \$116 million and we only had \$90 million or \$60 million or whatever." What a huge difference—must be 0.1 per cent or something, is it? But yet somehow this is a high spending government! In fact, Mr Humphries you should be aware that we have also made savings.

Now, I am prepared to accept that Mr Humphries stands in this place and he is often confused, to be kind. He is confused about the \$344 million—which government brought that to the people of the ACT. He has been confused about that for years. So he is a little confused and a slow learner.

**MR HARGREAVES:** My supplementary question to the Treasurer is: can he please advise the Assembly of some of the cost pressures faced by this government in framing the budget?

**MR QUINLAN:** Thank you again, Mr Hargreaves. I think it is very important that we recognise that in putting this budget together—in putting together, might I say, an honest budget—it is necessary to include all of those expected expenditures and commitments. But what we have is: they were gunna fix them. Even at this morning's budget breakfast, I think we had this from Mr Smyth, defending some of the issues that we thought we inherited. They were gunna fix it. They were gunna fund the medical school—signed an MOU, did the media, did the photo op, but we were just gunna put the money in a bit later.

Mr Smyth told us this morning he was gunna fix the remand centre. He was gunna fix that. Well, they were gunna—they were going to fund the nurses pay increase, but it wasn't in the budget. In fact, probably the most manipulative element of the previous government's budget was the fact that they made offers and knew there was a level of increase that was inevitable. But no, to make it look good they just simply left it out.

And, when I did my objective analysis of the appropriation bills, I put that one down to you, Gunna.

The Liberals knew that it was necessary for more money for the AFP EBA. They were gunna put that in as well. And we hear that they were responsible for initiating the ICT Centre of Excellence—and they were gunna fund that too. Well, we have funded that. And yet somehow, when you pick up on these things that that lot were gunna do, you're a big spending government! How about that?

### **Mugga Lane tip—operation of facilities**

**MS DUNDAS:** My question is for the Minister for Urban Services and does not relate to the budget. Thiess Services recently constructed a new shed at the Mugga Lane tip, adjacent to the existing Revolve depot. Does the government intend that Revolve be the lessee of this new shed?

**MR WOOD:** There is quite a dispute about Revolve and what is happening at the Mugga Lane tip. In February 2001, Thiess was awarded the contract for the operations of the landfill and the construction of a small-vehicle transfer station, including improved facilities for re-useable items, and you have seen that massive shed that has been put up there. The intent of the territory's agreements with Revolve and Thiess was for Revolve to continue to operate the re-usables facility that you're talking about at Mugga Lane, as a subcontractor to Thiess.

However, during the construction of the facilities at Mugga Lane it became clear that the relationship between the two bodies wasn't crash-hot. ACT No Waste has in this period been negotiating with both Thiess and Revolve to try to get them agreed. They are currently negotiating in an attempt to formalise a long-term agreement.

That is where it is at the moment, and we hope that an agreement will be reached shortly. It has not been reached yet, but we think some progress has been made, and ACT No Waste will continue to work between the two parties to try to make an agreement work.

**MS DUNDAS:** I have a supplementary question. Perhaps as a suggestion to move the discussions along, considering that Revolve, which is a not-for-profit organisation, has played a vital role in reducing waste going to landfill over the last 15 years, will the government undertake to directly negotiate an affordable lease agreement with Revolve for the new shed, rather than requiring Revolve to have the contract through Thiess Services?

**MR WOOD:** That is a contractual matter. I am not sure that the nature of the contract with Thiess would allow us to do that. Thiess has quite a clear contract, and maybe there are some interpretations to be placed on it by various parties, but I do not believe that it is possible to give a direction in this case. But, in view of your question and your interest, I will ask the question and have a look to see what further might be done to resolve the issue.

### **Hospital funding**

**MR SMYTH:** Mr Speaker, my question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, your budget handed down yesterday has increased funding of \$300,000 for outpatient services at the Calvary Public Hospital, and that is very commendable. You have also claimed in your press release that demand at the Calvary Public Hospital is increasing at the rate of 7.5 per cent per annum, which is more than 3,000 patient services a year for that hospital.

Why is it then, minister, that outpatients services at the two Canberra public hospitals will rise by less than one extra patient service per day, or 350 for the year? Why is it that, despite the substantial injection of funds that you have put into the system, there is virtually no improvement in patient care?

**MR STANHOPE:** Well, that is a rather long bow to suggest that there has been no improvement in patient care. It's a nonsense in fact. Certainly there has been a dramatic increase in emergency medical and surgery patients at the Calvary Hospital, as the member has just indicated. In fact, there has been an increase of 7 per cent at Calvary compared to last year.

There has been a commensurate drop at the Canberra Hospital, I think of around about 4.5 per cent, which is interesting in terms of the development of the community. Calvary Hospital is certainly increasing its output most significantly, particularly with the development of Gungahlin—to the extent that, as I understand it, Calvary dealt with 45,000 outpatients over the last year compared to 50,000 at the Canberra Hospital.

So it really is particularly interesting to see the extent to which the work of the respective emergency departments is merging. As a result of the increased activity in Calvary Hospital, I received advice just a few weeks ago that the department was pleased to inject an additional \$1.74 million into the Calvary Public Hospital to enable that record level of elective surgery to be provided in 2001-02.

We did respond to the enormous amount of work and the productivity at Calvary Hospital by providing it just recently with an additional \$1.74 million, and it was able to continue the absolutely fantastic work that it is doing at a very high level, and ensuring a very significant level of health service to the people of the ACT.

I think that is what I find offensive about your question, Mr Smyth—the suggestion that Canberrans that attend at our public hospitals don't receive the fantastic level of service that they do. We have provided additional funding in the budget and, of course, Calvary also received \$3.6 million from the critical and urgent treatment scheme, so it received \$3.6 million worth of funding in 2001-02 from that particular scheme as well.

It is also relevant, I think, that we just dwell on the circumstances that we inherited from the previous government in relation to health care delivery in the ACT.

**Mr Humphries:** Can you answer the question first?

**MR STANHOPE:** Well, I am answering the question. You are talking about an injection of \$300,000 into Calvary and a diminution of health care standards and services for the people of Canberra. Let it be said that we have injected an additional \$36 million through this budget into the health system in the ACT—a massive increase in support for the people of Canberra. This is a government that has taken its promises to the people of Canberra seriously. It was on the basis of the promises we made in relation to health, education and planning that we succeeded to the extent that we did in the election.

That is why we received the record vote which we received just eight months ago at the last election. That's why there was a 16 per cent swing against you—and just have a think about how many people that represents. Just think about the number of

26 June 2002

Canberrans that rejected your stewardship of Canberra. Just think about the number of Canberrans that were asked to vote on your performance and found you wanting—and rejected you in the massive way that they did, and quite rightly so.

They rejected you because of your incapacity to manage, for your mismanagement, for your incompetence and because you did not make the commitment to the health and education services of Canberra that the people of Canberra wanted. And that is why you see in this budget what you see—\$27 million of real money, cash money, being injected into education. No free buses—\$27 million of extra money for education; \$36 million of extra new money for health.

**Mr Smyth:** I raise a point of order, Mr Speaker. I don't think the Chief Minister wants to avoid answering the question, but it was about the lack of outpatient services at Calvary. This is a health issue. He seems to be talking about education. The record is stuck. Can I have an answer to my question, please?

**MR SPEAKER:** I refer the Chief Minister to standing order 118 (a) and I just ask him to confine himself to the subject matter of the question.

**MR STANHOPE:** Thank you, Mr Speaker, I will. There is no lack of output at emergency services at Calvary Hospital. In fact, they have increased to 45,000; they are increasing dramatically. Output at the Calvary Hospital has increased dramatically, and we are supporting it. That is why we have injected an additional \$36 million into the health system in this one year. That is why we provided an additional \$8.7 million to the Canberra Hospital in an additional appropriation bill. That is why we have repeated that additional funding in this budget.

That is why we have provided an additional \$4 million over the next four years for respite care. That is why we have provided another \$4 million in this budget for mental health services. It is why we have provided another \$10 million extra funding over four years for disability services—more funding in one year than you provided in the last three years for disability services. Just dwell on it. We are providing, in one year, in extra funds for disability services for the most vulnerable people in this community, more than you provided in the last three years in additional funding.

We are providing, over the next four years, an additional \$10.3 million in disability services to actually overcome the major deficiencies in disability service delivery that Justice Gallop revealed in his report in relation to disability services. That is what we are doing.

I can't believe the temerity of you to get up in this place and seek to attack this government in relation to our commitment to health services in this community.

**MR SMYTH:** Mr Speaker, I ask a supplementary question. I will make it easy for the Chief Minister. In the 2001-2002 *Budget at a glance*, for the number of outpatients it says 210,000. In your document it says it goes up to 210,350.

**MR SPEAKER:** That is preamble, Mr Smyth. Are you ever going to get to the question?

**MR SMYTH:** The question is, Mr Speaker: why are they getting only one extra outpatient a day in your health service?

**MR SPEAKER:** I think the question has been fully answered.

**MR STANHOPE:** I am happy to repeat the commitment of this government to health service delivery in the ACT. I am happy to go to the range of initiatives that were funded in this budget. I am happy to talk about the additional \$400,000 in alcohol and drug initiatives. I am happy to talk about the additional \$4 million in mental health services. I am happy to talk about the additional \$4 million in respite care for the most vulnerable and frail in this community—the people that are pushed the hardest in this community.

**MR SPEAKER:** There is a point of order. Mr Stanhope, would you resume your seat.

**Mr Smyth:** Mr Speaker, I raise a point of order under standing order 118. The question is about the extra 350 outpatient services and why it is so few, when the government knows, and says in its own press release, that need goes up 7½ per cent, or more than 3,000 places, at Calvary. When will he admit he has failed the outpatient system?

**MR SPEAKER:** Mr Smyth, it is a bit rich, I think, to ask a question about health in relation to outputs of one of the smaller areas of health and not expect a response from the relevant minister in relation to the broader question. I cannot see how you would rule that to be irrelevant.

**Mr Smyth:** Mr Speaker, it is irrelevant in that the question is about the Chief Minister's own press release, where he says that they know there is a 7½ per cent growth in the need for outpatient services at Calvary. That is more than 3,000 positions a day. In his own document—this is how relevant it is—they highlight the fact that there are only 350 extra outpatient services across the entire health system. What I want to know is: why has he let down accident and emergency and outpatient services across the system? That is what I want to know.

**MR STANHOPE:** Mr Speaker, for the information of members, I will just conclude on the other initiatives that we are providing in relation to health and the system of health and community care in Canberra.

There is an extra \$629,000 next year for home and community care matching funds. There is, as I said, the extra \$10.3 million for disability. There is an extra \$450,000 for next year for synthetic blood products. There is an extra \$300,000 next year for psycho-geriatric care—once again, providing support for the most vulnerable people in our community.

There is an additional \$17 million for the establishment of a medical school at the ANU. There was \$11 million for the finalisation of the nursing pay rise—another one of your gunna initiatives. That was \$11 million which we provided. We provided it—you were gunna, but you never got around to it.

There is an additional \$2.8 million for increases in the SACS payment. To answer the question—this goes directly to the heart of it—there is an additional \$8.7 million in this budget, on top of the \$8.7 million in the appropriation bill, for funding pressures to the

26 June 2002

Canberra Hospital. Work that out—an additional \$17 million in relation to funding vital initiatives of the Canberra Hospital.

How did you go in relation to that? Well, you can't match it, can you? At what stage in the last seven years did you provide in a single year an additional \$17 million for the Canberra Hospital? At what stage in any year over the last seven years did you provide that level of additional support to the Canberra Hospital?

There is an additional \$76,000 for hospice care, for people at the terminal stage of their illness—for long-awaited additional beds for the hospice. There is an additional \$300,000 for the Calvary Hospital emergency department for growth in demand at the Calvary Hospital. There is an additional \$1.2 million at Calvary Hospital and the Canberra Hospital for increased throughput. That is the commitment of this government to health, and it leaves the previous government looking sick and paltry.

### **Charnwood skate park**

**MR STEFANIAK:** My question is to the Chief Minister in his capacity as the local member for Belconnen. Mr Stanhope, I note that in the budget handed down by your colleague the Treasurer yesterday the government removed the \$500,000 allocated to the 2002-2003 financial year for a skate park which was to be constructed at the old Charnwood High School site. Chief Minister, on what basis did you agree to the withdrawal of this project? Did you consult with your constituents before taking this decision, and, if not, why not?

**MR STANHOPE:** Thank you, Mr Stefaniak, for the question. As the Treasurer has indicated on a number of occasions, we did take some significant decisions in this budget process as a result of our determination to meet our electoral commitments and to govern responsibly, fairly and honestly. As a result of the state of affairs that we discovered when we had a look at the budget situation that we had inherited, we made some tough decisions.

As a consequence, we did reprioritise. We did, as a consequence, not proceed with a number of initiatives, and this is one of them. And I don't apologise for that, Mr Stefaniak. We went to the last election with a range of commitments and promises. We went to the last election with a determination to meet the core issues of the Canberra community in relation to education, health, planning and community safety. And we met every single one of our promises in relation to that.

We met all of our commitments to the people of Canberra in relation to our determination to restore this city to the pre-eminent position that it once had, and wants, in relation to education. And I will repeat our commitments to education and education funding if you would like me to. We dispensed with the \$27 million free bus rides. We have actually committed greater support to health services and community care than you ever did. We have restored the capacity of our public hospitals to—

**Mr Stefaniak:** Mr Speaker, I raise a point of order under standing order 118 (a).

**MR SPEAKER:** Well, I think the Chief Minister has answered your question, to be frank.

**MR STEFANIAK:** I have a supplementary question, Mr Speaker, in that case. Chief Minister, what new facilities, if any, will you provide for the people of West Belconnen, now that your government has knocked out the skateboard park and also the tennis courts that were also planned for that area?

**MR STANHOPE:** These are interesting, good, parish-pump issues for a local member, particularly one in opposition, to concentrate on in this context, Bill, but they are very short-sighted—these questions around what did you do and what are you providing. Let me tell you now the most important and fundamental thing that we are providing for the people of Charnwood, and particularly the kids of Charnwood. We are providing them with the best education system in Australia. If there is one thing demanded of a government in relation to its responsibility to its community and to its children, it is to provide to every child equality of opportunity in relation to education, so that they have the capacity to take their place in society, in the community, and to achieve whatever their dreams and aspirations may be—and that’s what we’re doing.

They did not want a free bus out there, Bill. They wanted a really good school. They didn’t want your free bus scheme, Bill. They wanted the best possible education for their kids. That’s why they rejected it. That’s why they voted against you. That’s why you got 2½ votes out there, Bill—because you did not look at the fundamentals; you didn’t provide them the best possible education. And that’s what they’re looking for. It is the greatest gift that a government can give to its community, and particularly to its children—the capacity to participate in an education system which ensures equality of opportunity at the end of the day. And that’s what we’re doing.

We are not just providing an extra \$27 million, but an extra \$27 million on top of growth. You really should blush, Bill, as the last Minister for Education, in relation to what this government has been able to achieve. I wonder, Bill, did you argue in cabinet against that free bus scheme? Did you stand up as Minister for Education and say, “Look, this is tawdry, cheap and nasty; let’s put this money into education”? Did you fight for it, Bill—or did you roll over?

**Mr Humphries:** Mr Speaker, I raise a point of order. I love to hear the Chief Minister on free school buses but the question was about a skateboard park and about tennis courts. Can we have an answer on that subject?

**MR SPEAKER:** I think the question has been answered.

**MR STANHOPE:** I will conclude on this one point. I think it was Mr Stefaniak or at least it was an interjection in relation to both a skateboard park and the so-called promised tennis courts. I have seen references to the promised tennis courts, I think perhaps a press release.

**Mr Stefaniak:** No, the money is there for those, and I’ll take your Treasurer through it if he can’t understand it.

**MR STANHOPE:** It is not, Bill. No, we’ve got Gunna Gary here, Bill. This is your gunna. Where is the money, mate?

26 June 2002

**Mr Stefaniak:** The money is there for the tennis courts.

**MR STANHOPE:** No, you spent it, Bill.

**Mr Stefaniak:** I'll take you both through it and show you. Maybe you spent it.

**MR STANHOPE:** Gunna Bill, Gunna Gary. Promise the world, deliver nothing. You were here. It's going to be your catchcry; it's going to be your legacy—all the things you said you'd do and didn't deliver.

### **Home birth program**

**MS TUCKER:** My question is also to Mr Stanhope. Mr Stanhope, earlier this year and in the budget tabled this week you made a commitment to a public-funded home birth program. Are you aware that the planning of this service is proceeding at the Canberra Hospital now, independently of the department's planned working group, with an estimated start date of August?

**MR STANHOPE:** I agree with you that the issue of ensuring that women have choice in birthing options is a very important one. I think you are aware of my views on this. Indeed, I was pleased to meet with you and the Maternity Coalition in relation to the capacity within this community to, in the first instance, support independent midwives in their operations and in the provision of support for women within this community.

I regret—and it is a matter of significant regret to me—that the insurance industry simply withdrew all prospect of insurance to independent midwives. There was a unilateral decision across the board that independent midwives would not be insured—that they were, in effect, uninsurable. I think that is a pity, and there are issues relating to legal indemnity insurance that need to be highlighted, particularly in relation to those sorts of unilateral decisions which have absolutely no regard for the insurance or claims history of independent midwives.

So that is the situation we find ourselves with. I was intent on responding to that. I have responded to that, and this budget does reveal, as you know, that we provide an additional \$100,000 to the Canberra Hospital for the Canberra Birth Clinic to allow an outreach home birth service to be operated from the Canberra Hospital, subject to our capacity to obtain reinsurance in relation to that.

It is my expectation that the development of that service will be done in full consultation with the working party that was developed. That was my intention, my desire and my wish, and I am not aware that that wish is not being met.

**MS TUCKER:** I have a supplementary question. Why is it that you are putting this program in an acute setting when all the research evidence on home birth services supports a non-acute management structure? There is no precedent for such a management structure in Australia and no precedent for home birth services to be provided via a hospital.

**MR STANHOPE:** Well, I am not sure I would agree with your assertion that the service that we are proposing, and that is being developed, is one that can be said to be delivered from an acute care setting. It is my expectation, in relation to the philosophy of care that you associate with home birth, that we are not talking about the development of an acute service, but I think the philosophy and the understanding within the Canberra Hospital maternity unit in relation to home births is well understood.

I obviously detect the level of concern and the view that you have, and obviously the views that have been expressed to you by constituents, in relation to the way it appears to you or your perception as to how this program is developing, being developed and potentially being implemented, and I will pursue the issues that you raised with some vigour, Ms Tucker.

### **Education reviews**

**MS MacDONALD:** My question is to the minister for education. Minister, in light of comments by the opposition spokesperson on education, reported in the *Canberra Times* today, that reviews are a “bloody nuisance”, can you outline the reasons why the government has initiated these important investigations into education in the ACT?

**MR CORBELL:** I thank Ms MacDonald for the question. I was very interested to read Mr Pratt’s comments in the *Canberra Times* today that reviews are “a bloody nuisance”. I would like to outline for the information of members the work the government has undertaken.

The government commits a range of funds to ensure that we understand fully the scope of issues in the ACT Education sector and respond appropriately to them. The first and most significant investigation the government is undertaking is in relation to future education funding arrangements for government and non-government schools in the ACT. It is interesting that Mr Pratt thinks that this review is a “bloody nuisance”. It is interesting because this review is urgently needed. It is needed because the federal Liberal Party’s socio-economic status funding formula, if implemented in the ACT, would mean that every non-government school in the ACT, bar one, will receive less funding from the federal Liberal government.

So why is it that Mr Pratt, the Liberal Party spokesperson on education here in the ACT, thinks that this is a “bloody nuisance”? Is it because he somehow thinks that this review might actually question the assumptions that his federal colleagues have sought to impose on non-government schools in the ACT? And is it odd that the shadow minister for education actually is defending a federal Liberal Party funding model for non-government schools that delivers less funding for non-government schools in the ACT, bar one?

Why is it that the shadow minister for education is out there criticising this inquiry as a waste of time, when it looks at the very factors which, if implemented by their federal colleagues, will result in less funding coming to the non-government school sector in the ACT? It is an interesting relationship about a “bloody nuisance”.

**Mr Pratt:** Well, they are.

**MR CORBELL:** I am pleased to hear that, Mr Speaker. Let me just draw members' attention to one other very important investigation. Mr Pratt has also described as a "bloody nuisance" a review of school counselling activity in the ACT. This review is a specific response to a recommendation of the standing committee report on students at risk of not achieving satisfactory outcomes. So it seems to me that here we have an Assembly report specifically recommending that we need to look closer at counselling services for students at risk of not achieving satisfactory outcomes—and Mr Pratt thinks it's a "bloody nuisance". Perhaps that is why they are sitting on that side of the house and we are sitting on this side of the house—if their approach to all recommendations of committee inquiries, particularly committee inquiries into such important issues as young people at risk of not achieving satisfactory outcomes, is that it is a "bloody nuisance".

I am very happy to be conducting the reviews, because we are responding directly to very important recommendations made by a committee of this place—something, by the way, which the previous government just failed to respond to at all. They did not even bother to respond to the report on students at risk. They had it for nearly a year and just weren't even interested in responding to perhaps one of the most significant inquiries into young people at risk in our community.

**Mr Quinlan:** Most students are a bloody nuisance as well!

**MR CORBELL:** Indeed. Apparently, according to the Liberals, young people at risk are a bloody nuisance, too. Young people at risk clearly are a bloody nuisance for Mr Pratt. We treat our responsibilities seriously, and these investigations and reviews will make sure that the government's response is well informed, based on evidence and responds to the very clear need that is emerging through committee reports and a range of other mechanisms.

**MS MacDONALD:** I have a supplementary question. Does the government share the view of the Liberal opposition that reviews into the provision of services to young people at risk are a bloody nuisance?

**MR CORBELL:** Clearly we don't share that view, but I am pleased to hear that the Liberals confirm that is their view of services for young people at risk—that they're all just a bloody nuisance. But this government is investing more in education in the ACT than any government since self-government. That is the record of this Labor government to date.

We believe it is absolutely appropriate to respond in an informed and evidence-based manner to the issues facing our education sector, both in government and non-government schools. Mr Pratt comes out, in his very detailed and well-considered way in response to this budget, and just says, "What a bloody nuisance". I think the education community deserves more from this shadow minister—and this government is delivering more than those opposite ever did.

## **Land release**

**MRS DUNNE:** Mr Speaker, my question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, are you aware of concerns expressed by the building industry that it is suffering from the peaks-and-troughs effect of uncertainty over the ACT land release program and that new

housing starts are falling as a result? Given that as recently as this morning you joined with your colleague the Minister for Planning to talk up the government's land release program, and given that there seems to be a discrepancy of about 1,000 blocks between what you are claiming to have been released and what the industry can find to build on, can you tell us exactly how many blocks were released to the building industry since 1 July last year?

**MR STANHOPE:** No, I cannot. I might say that I met with the chief executive of the Master Builders Association this morning, David Dawes, and I discussed this issue and a range of other issues with him, as I do on a regular basis. Certainly, I am aware of the views of representatives of the building and development industry about land supply.

I am aware of the debate around the adequacy of the land release program under your government prior to the last election, and certainly as indicated in your last planning. And I am very aware of the views of the building industry and the Master Builders Association that your land release program was totally inadequate and has actually now left the territory in a situation where there certainly are enormous pressures in relation to the housing industry.

I am aware very much that the builders and developers of Canberra take very grimly the extent to which you failed them in the appropriate planning of land release. I am aware that they are very conscious of the fact that you let them down grievously.

I don't know the numbers. My colleague Mr Corbell, as Minister for Planning, perhaps could have given you a more succinct answer in relation to the specifics of the question you asked. But, in terms of the generalities, yes, I am aware of the concern and debate within the community about land release and about the number of sites, and, in a discussion with Mr Dawes this morning, one of the issues that we discussed was land release, the availability of—

**Mrs Dunne:** That's what they're saying.

**MR STANHOPE:** Well, it comes to this point: the availability of greenfields land and the number of sites that have been made available—for redevelopment, inner city development, consolidation, dual occupancies, and certainly the availability of raw land in greenfields sites.

So, as I say, if you want the specifics then ask the relevant minister, namely the Minister for Planning. In terms of the generalities, I am aware of the issue, I am aware of the extent to which the development industry and lobby are most concerned at the state that you left the land release program in. And I am very aware that Mr Corbell has moved to increase significantly the number of sites that are available for the development of dwellings, both new greenfields sites and redevelopment sites. And we need to be clear in our terminology here. There is an interchange amongst everybody participating in this debate of the word "blocks" and the word "sites". We are talking about sites, of course, and that is why I say it includes redevelopment sites, dual occupancy sites—

**Mrs Dunne:** Dwellings—no, I'm talking greenfields. You can talk about—

26 June 2002

**MR STANHOPE:** You're talking only about greenfields? You're not talking about sites, so we're talking about the—

**Mrs Dunne:** You can talk redevelopment as much as you like but that is in addition to the 1,000.

**MR SPEAKER:** Order! This is getting a bit conversational. It would be better if you did not interject, and it would be better if you did not fire the barbs to which the Chief Minister feels bound to respond. I would just let him get on with answering the question.

**MR STANHOPE:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. I will conclude by saying, yes, I am acutely aware of those issues. Indeed, I met with the Master Builders Association as recently as 11 am this morning. We had a full and frank discussion around all of these issues, and I would ask my colleague the Minister for Planning to give you the details and specifics to the question you're asking.

**MR SPEAKER:** Thank you, Chief Minister. Would you like him to do that?

**MR CORBELL:** Mr Speaker, I am very happy to add to the answer provided by the Chief Minister and perhaps just to clarify and assist Mrs Dunne with her confusion. The land release program 2001-2002 proposed 510 greenfields sites, as part of the Liberal government's land release program. The advice I have received as of Monday is that the government has released close to 1,000 blocks, so we have seen a significant increase in the number of greenfields sites released.

Mr Speaker, the total land release program for 2001-02 had a total number of dwelling sites proposed to be released of 2,281. That included 510 greenfields blocks, 521 existing urban blocks and 500 redevelopment proposals. And then there were 400 sites to be released through the GDA and 350 sites to be released by KFDA. GDA is counted separately, although most GDA sites are greenfields sites.

So let us put it this way: the Liberals proposed to release a total of 2,281 dwelling sites, both greenfield block and redevelopment activity. It is estimated that we will come close to having released 3,069 dwelling sites—just under 1,000 more than the total number of dwelling sites proposed to be released by the previous Liberal government. That is in this financial year. So the government's program is significantly larger than that program by the previous government in the same financial year. On top of that—

**Mrs Dunne:** Well, why is it the building industry can't find the blocks to build on?

**MR CORBELL:** The private land developers might not be able to find the blocks, Mrs Dunne, but whether or not builders and home buyers can find the blocks is another matter. The other point that needs to be made is this: this government has actually significantly expanded the land release program for our first budget. There are an additional 900 greenfields blocks now available in our ready-release program to take account of any potential extra demand, or because other sites fall off the program due to environmental or other reasons.

It is interesting to note that the Liberals never had a ready release program. They made no provision for the situation where a proposed land release failed to occur because of environmental or other factors.

For example, when the Lawson land release failed to proceed this year because of a decision by the Commonwealth Defence Department, there was no immediate scope available to us to simply slot something else into the program. We had to go and find and do the work of developing something.

What we have done, for the first time in the history of self-government, is build in an extra year's worth of supply, greenfields land, into our land release program for the coming financial year—something you failed to do in the seven years that you were responsible for land release in the ACT.

So for you to stand up in this place and lecture this government on the land release program, when first of all we are releasing more dwelling sites than you were ever planning to release in this financial year and, secondly, we have a land release program in greenfields sites which is double what you ever proposed to have, is simply hypocrisy at its worst.

**MRS DUNNE:** I have a supplementary question. I think it probably could be answered by asking the minister to table the list from which he read, because I would like, by close of business today, a schedule of all the blocks that the government claims to have released this year.

**MR CORBELL:** Mr Speaker, I will endeavour to get that detailed information for Mrs Dunne, and present it to the Assembly as soon as possible.

### **City Library**

**MS GALLAGHER:** My question is to the Minister for Urban Services, Mr Wood. Minister, there has been a proposal to develop the City Library in the Link at the Canberra Theatre Centre. Can the minister inform the Assembly about the status of this proposal?

**MR WOOD:** Mr Speaker, with the Cultural Facilities Corporation I am committed to progressing this project and will be authorising the corporation, as the managing agency for the project, to lodge an application for development works approval with the National Capital Authority, which is the planning approval body for the site.

At this stage the project has been withdrawn from the capital works program to allow time to seek NCA approval for the project design, and then to develop an updated costing for the design once it has been approved, and an updated construction schedule. This will provide a sound basing for seeking revised funding for the project in the 2003-04 capital works program. This approach is necessary to reflect the major changes that have occurred to the design, in order to take into account user needs, comments received during public consultation, and National Capital Authority planning requirements, especially height limitations due to the need to maintain the City Hill/Mount Ainslie view corridor.

These changes have resulted in the project now having a very different design from that on which the original project costing had been done. Consequently there has been a delay in moving the project forward. It is the case also that the tight capital works program, including the somewhat overcrowded program flowing from the current year, necessitated the deferral in the 2002-03 budget.

The deferral of the project will then make funds available in the 2002-03 capital works program to address other government capital works priorities. Funds have been set aside, however, within the funding for the Link and library project for this year, the current year, to prepare a further submission for capital works funding to enable the project to proceed to tendering and construction.

### **Funding of non-government schools**

**MR PRATT:** Mr Speaker, my question is directed to the minister for education, Mr Corbell. Minister, I know that your title is minister for education, not minister for government schooling. Therefore, how do you justify allocating only 5 per cent of the \$27 million you have allocated as additional funding for schools to the Catholic systemic schools, when they have 28 per cent of the school population, and nothing to the independent schools when they have 10 per cent of the ACT school population? Minister, why have you played favourites and thereby disenfranchised almost half the parents of Canberra?

**MR CORBELL:** Mr Speaker, I am sure it comes as no surprise to anyone in this place that a Labor government has a strong commitment to public education. And it is not a view which I have hidden since I have been minister for education. The promotion of an effective, strong, viable and first-rate public education system is a key commitment of this government. That is why this government is spending \$27 million more—in fact, is spending more than any other government in the history of self-government—on education in the ACT.

I should stress that 62 per cent of children in the ACT attend a government school. So let us just understand that the government school system is still far and away the key and most significant provider of education services to the majority of people in our community. That said, we also need to understand and work with those people who choose to send their children, as is their right and their choice, to a non-government school.

That is why this government has made a commitment to invest money in information technology for Catholic systemic schools—another election commitment that we honoured in the budget delivered by the Treasurer yesterday.

The government made a clear commitment during the election campaign also that we would assess the needs that existed across the education system in the ACT, and then we would respond on the basis of understanding that need. And that is why we have established one of these reviews which Mr Pratt calls “a bloody nuisance”.

That’s why we’ve done it—because it is an election commitment. And everyone in the ACT who represents different voices in the education community has said, “We want to get a better grip on the needs that exist across our system, where the demands are and

how we best respond to them on the basis of need and equity.” And that is what the Connors inquiry is all about. It will not simply be about arguing over the remaining \$7.4 million that is left from the free school bus scheme commitment.

I want to assure those people in the non-government sector that it is not just arguing about that piece of the cake. It’s about responding—

**Mr Pratt:** All of them?

**MR CORBELL:** All of them, Mr Speaker. It is about responding to the needs in the system, where they exist, and addressing them. And if that means that we have to seek funding beyond that \$7 million then I will be arguing in cabinet for funding in future budgets to address those needs. That is my job as minister for education, and that is a job that cabinet will have as it collectively works out its priorities for future budgets.

The government’s commitment is clear and unequivocal. We will continue to invest in education across the ACT. We will continue to stand by our commitment to ensure that public education is the best system in the ACT, and that it delivers parents choice in terms of the school they go to and the services they receive—free of charge in a public education system.

But we will continue to work with and respect the right of those who choose to send their children to non-government schools for religious or other philosophical or personal beliefs. And we will address the needs that exist in those systems on the basis of the comprehensive investigation being conducted by Lindsay Connors into need in education funding.

Let us just remember that this is the man who professes to be the advocate of the non-government sector but also defends a system, implemented by his federal colleagues, that will result in less funding for every non-government school in the ACT bar one.

**MR PRATT:** Mr Speaker, I have a supplementary question. Will you now allocate to non-government schools a substantial proportion of the \$7.4 million slush fund you have retained in your kitty or will that also go to government schools, thereby exacerbating your unfair funding allocations?

**MR CORBELL:** Mr Speaker, I have already answered that question.

### **Public dental health program**

**MR CORNWELL:** My question is to Mr Stanhope, Minister for Health. Minister, in the 2001 election you promised to “Maintain an additional allocation to the public health dental program of \$2.567 million over the next four years”. Yet the budget Mr Quinlan put forward yesterday makes no mention of any additional allocation to the public health dental program. In fact, Minister, the total number of services to be provided—and this is found at Budget Paper No 4, page 159—reduces from 70,000 for the current year to 68,300 next year.

26 June 2002

My question is: have you broken your promise to the people of the ACT and will 1,700 people now have to wait until at least the next budget, or after the next budget, before they can receive dental services?

**MR STANHOPE:** No, we have not broken a promise, Mr Speaker. In the last election campaign the ALP did go to the election with a policy in relation to dental care, and for Mr Cornwell's information and the information of members I will read it:

The cost of private services, and long waiting times in the public system mean that the dental health of many in our community is very poor indeed. Currently people have to wait over two years for restorative work and nearly eight months for dentures in the public dental health program. This represents a marked deterioration in the public dental program from the 1990s. The Federal Labor Government injected \$228 million into public sector dental services between 1994 and 1996. In 1996 the waiting time for restorative work was about five weeks. The scheme was abolished in the first Howard Government Budget—surely one of the most mean spirited decisions in health budget records.

I will just repeat that sentence:

The scheme was abolished in the first Howard Government Budget—surely one of the most mean spirited decisions in health budget records.

I might just repeat that: the dental scheme was abolished by the federal Liberal government—“surely one of the most mean spirited decisions in health budget records”. Have I repeated it enough?

**Mrs Dunne:** Mr Speaker, I raise a point of order under standing order 62—tedious and repetitious. This is Mr Stanhope's stock in trade, just repeating things over and over again.

**MR STANHOPE:** Oh, repetitive? You don't want me to repeat that? I continue:

Continuing discomfort of unattended dental condition in turn affects general ...

**Mr Humphries:** Mr Speaker, we have raised a point of order about this.

**MR SPEAKER:** Yes, I think she has a point. I think the message has probably sunk in by now. Mr Stanhope, do you want to continue?

**MR STANHOPE:** I'm sorry, Mr Speaker?

**MR SPEAKER:** Repetition—Mrs Dunne complained that you had repeated it too many times.

**MR STANHOPE:** Right, the federal Liberal government's attitude, the fact that they abolished it?

**MR SPEAKER:** That was the one she has was complaining about.

**MR STANHOPE:** I won't repeat that. I will not repeat that the federal Liberals abolished the dental program.

**MR SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr Stanhope.

**MR STANHOPE:** The Labor Party's policy then went on to say:

Continuing discomfort of unattended dental conditions in turn affects general health. Waiting times must be reduced.

Preventative measures are also vital.

Labor announced in April—

and that was last year—

that it would allocate significant additional funds to the public dental health program. The ACT Government—

the then Liberal government—

picked up Labor's initiative and allocated an additional \$2.576 million over four years to the public dental health program.

A Federal ALP Government has pledged to restore the funding, abolished by the Howard Government, for the public dental health services in the States and Territories. On 8 October, Federal Labor Leader, Kim Beazley, announced that \$100 million will be allocated to a National Dental Health program.

Labor will—

and these are the promises we then made in the context of that preamble to the policy—

- Maintain an additional allocation to the public health dental program of \$2.567 million
- Participate in the public dental health program of a Federal Labor Government
- Include dental treatment and dental health programs and indigenous health programs.

Mr Speaker, those promises have been kept.

**Mr Humphries:** Well, how come there was a cut in the sum of services then?

**MR STANHOPE:** There was a cut in services because the funding that was provided through the \$2.576 million started—as I'm sure you recall, Mr Humphries—with the allocation of an additional \$1 million to reduce waiting lists. That was the initial decision taken—one-off funding—and \$500,000 to refer clients to private providers increased the relative value of units to 71,300.

26 June 2002

These figures were reduced to 68,300 to reflect the 2002-03 contract. The recurrent funding has been allocated and is continuing at \$2.576 million. The promise was kept in full.

I ask that further questions be placed on the notice paper.

## **Auditor-General's Report No 4 of 2002**

**Mr Speaker** presented the following paper:

Auditor-General ACT—Auditor General's Report—No 4 of 2002—Framework for Internal Auditing in Territory Agencies, dated 25 June 2002.

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

That the Assembly authorises the publication of Auditor-General's Report No 4 of 2002.

## **Executive contracts**

**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, pursuant to sections 31A and 79—Copies of executive contracts or instruments—

Short term contracts:

Pam Davoren, dated 31 May 2002.

Sandra Georges, dated 7 June 2002.

Lucy Bitmead, dated 4 June 2002.

Schedule D variation:

Lucy Bitmead, dated 6 May 2002.

I ask for leave to make a short statement.

Leave granted.

**MR STANHOPE**: I present another set of executive contracts. These documents are tabled in accordance with section 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 4 June 2002. Today I present three short-term contracts and one contract variation. The list of contracts and variations will be circulated to members.

For the information of members, I present the following paper:

Health and Community Care Services Act, pursuant to section 25 and the Public Sector Management Act, pursuant to sections 31A and 79—Copies of executive contract—

Short term contract:

Laurann Yen, dated 10 May 2002.

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

Leave granted.

**MR STANHOPE:** I table this contract as Minister for Health in accordance with section 25 of the Health and Community Care Services Act and in accordance with section 31A of the Public Sector Management Act as modified by the Health and Community Care Services Act, which requires the tabling of all executive contracts and contract variations. Today I present a variation of a short-term contract. Advice of the variation will be circulated to members.

## **Leave of absence**

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

That leave of absence be granted to Mrs Cross for today, 26 June, and tomorrow, 27 June 2002.

## **Drug Dependence Discussion of matter of public importance**

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

The treatment of drug dependence in the ACT as a health issue, noting that this week is Drug Action Week.

**MS DUNDAS (3.45):** I have proposed this matter of public importance, as this week, in addition to being the ACT budget week, is national Drug Action Week. During the week numerous events are being held throughout the country to promote education and discussion of drug issues. Each day has a theme.

Monday was dedicated to drug prevention policy. Yesterday drug treatment was dealt with—and I note that the Chief Minister used Tuesday to open Lesley's Place, the nation's first service dedicated to providing supervised withdrawal support to women and women with children before, during and after withdrawal.

Today's focus is youth drug policy, a theme that I am sure this Assembly is aware I am particularly concerned about. Tomorrow there will be a focus on the drug issues affecting indigenous people, and on Friday the continuing legal problems surrounding drugs and the current legislative and law enforcement arrangements will be looked at. On Saturday, Drug Action Week will focus on the use of drugs in the media and how the media portrays the use of drugs in our society.

I applaud the efforts of all those who have contributed to Drug Action Week, especially the work of the Alcohol and Other Drugs Council of Australia, who have done much to facilitate events and involvement in this week.

26 June 2002

However, despite the continuing efforts of many community groups and individuals, there is still widespread belief that illicit drug dependence is a crime issue. There is still the unfortunately popular but considerably mistaken belief that the way to deal with the drug problem is to get tougher on crime. Tougher sentences, tougher laws, more police, stricter customs and zero tolerance are continually peddled as solutions. Let me stress: they are not solutions.

Decades of law enforcement solutions have failed miserably to make any appreciable difference to the control of illicit substances in multiple countries. Yet governments, including our own federal government, continue to push the argument that giving more resources to law enforcement will actually work. We must look for alternatives, and at least in this Assembly I believe that the message is getting through that illegal drug use is primarily a health issue and should be treated as such.

A number of members have previously stated that, although our thinking is starting to change on these issues, we do not talk about them often enough. I hope that this MPI goes some way to continuing the debate we must have.

The Australian Democrats have long advocated a harm minimisation approach to drug policy. Drugs harm in many ways. They include harm to the health of the user, even causing death; economic harm to the user and others affected by drug-related activity; social harm to families; drug-related violence or criminal stigma; and harm through public nuisance and drug-related crime.

We need to take a holistic approach that encompasses education, prevention, early intervention and continuing support for drug users. This needs to be done in a strategic and coordinated process so that people have continuing support available in different situations and at different stages. This means government needs to take responsibility for providing these services.

There are still too few support mechanisms in our community to ensure that drug-affected people have the resources and encouragement to get the assistance they require. Our rehabilitation clinics are full and, even after leaving rehabilitation, many drug users continue to find themselves homeless, jobless and friendless and end up relapsing, often out of despair. Co-ordination across the social service sector is required for harm minimisation policies to work effectively.

Despite the drawn-out public debate on supervised injecting facilities and the oft-mentioned heroin trial, we are still no closer to implementing these alternative strategies to combat drug dependence than we were when they were first proposed. The terrible consequences for the health of drug users continue to be highlighted by medical research. Drug use may result in mental health problems, including schizotypal illness, depression, brain injury and reduced memory and learning abilities. It may also result in other physical injury, including increased risk of bronchitis and respiratory diseases; circulatory dysfunction, including heart disease; liver cirrhosis; and a host of other ailments.

Injecting drug users have a drastically elevated occurrence of blood poisoning, tetanus, hepatitis B, hepatitis C and HIV. In addition, the incidence of car accidents, personal, sexual and domestic violence and abuse, and suicide is elevated under the influence of

drugs. The social costs, as we know, are enormous, and will continue to impact on the provision of social welfare services unless direct support and intervention are provided.

Equally, the economic impact of drug-related crime is considerable. A heavy narcotic user may spend in excess of \$100,000, much of it derived from illegal activity. Simply putting more cops on the beat will not solve the cause of much of the petty theft in this territory. It will simply shove more people into interstate jails and into an environment hardly conducive to recovery. We will see more wasted lives, when intervention and rehabilitation is what is required. It is a shame that the budget delivered yesterday failed to pick up on this.

We also need to focus on prevention. This means more than simply funding a discussion in a youth centre or a "just say no" campaign in a school. We need to give the people of Canberra the information to understand the consequences of drug use, and we need to tell those who decide to engage in drug-taking behaviour the safest way to do so. This would mean a wide variety of techniques for getting information across, including targeted programs, mass media use and information services.

There is also the need to target specific at-risk groups in the population for special attention when supporting and promoting harm minimisation objectives. These are young people, indigenous people, those in incarceration, multicultural groups and women who are pregnant or breastfeeding. The development of distinctive programs for all these categories is essential to be able to address drug use in an effective and personalised manner.

Treating drug dependence and drug use as a health issue is the only way forward in this debate. We need to continue to adopt an evidence-based approach and plan strategies over a long time span, recognising that change will come gradually. We need leadership and the support that is needed to trial and evaluate new strategies and to provide financial support at a realistic level.

**MR STANHOPE** (Chief Minister, Attorney-General, Minister for Health, Minister for Community Affairs and Minister for Women) (3.52): Mr Speaker, I am very pleased to rise in support of the sentiments expressed by Ms Dundas. This is a matter of public importance. When each of us speaks about drug dependency and illicit substance abuse, we do so conscious of the extent to which it continues to be a serious problem for our community—as all drug use and ingestion is a serious problem for this community and, indeed, for Australia.

It is generally accepted that one in five Australians die of a drug-related cause. In 1998 an estimated 22,500 Australians died of drug-related causes and 175,000 were hospitalised as a result of conditions caused by harmful drug use or, in other words, drug abuse. It is conservatively estimated that the cost of harmful drug use to the Australian community is about \$18 billion a year, with \$12 billion of that due to tobacco use alone. These include the tangible and intangible costs but do not include the costs related to passive smoking, which US authorities studying drug use estimate to account for approximately 10 per cent of the costs of active smoking.

26 June 2002

The media tends to focus attention on illicit drugs, but people are still far more likely to die from smoking and alcohol-related diseases. Tobacco smoking is the single, largest, preventable cause of premature death and disease in Australia. Each year it kills more people in Australia than the total number of people killed by alcohol, illicit drugs, AIDS, murder, suicide, road crashes, rail crashes, air crashes, poisoning, drowning, fires, falls, lightning, electrocutions, snakes, spiders and sharks.

Of all drug-related deaths, more than three-quarters are attributed to tobacco use. Tobacco smoking is estimated to kill more than 18,000 Australians each year and leave thousands of others with chronic and disabling diseases and conditions. The three major leading causes of disease and injury in Australia in 1996 were all associated with tobacco smoking. They are heart disease, stroke and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. Lung cancer is the fifth leading cause of disease or injury in Australia. When we talk about drug abuse, particularly of illicit drugs, we need to be conscious of the fact that the two drugs that over and above all others cause damage, death, distress and misery are alcohol and tobacco.

A recent data release of the illicit drug reporting system indicates that, while heroin-related harms in the community may be falling in the short term, these harms are resurfacing in relation to other types of drugs, such as methamphetamines. In addition, we should never lose sight of the overwhelming majority of drug-related harms that studies such as the national drug strategy household surveys indicate stem from illicit drug use and dependency.

Ms Dundas has called to our attention that it is Drug Action Week, during which the drug and other alcohol treatment sector across Australia highlights the variety of solutions that communities are using to tackle alcohol and other drug dependence. A quick survey of the activities planned for Drug Action Week indicates that the health aspect of the treatment of drug dependency is only one dimension of the harm minimisation associated with drug use and dependency. My colleague Mr Corbell, the Minister for Education, Youth and Family Services, will speak about other important aspects, such as the role of the education system in preventing the potential harm associated with drug dependency.

I am happy to focus on the activities planned for Drug Action Week in the ACT. They demonstrate that, in addition to treatment options, there are many ways in which communities successfully minimise the harm associated with drug use and dependency. For those who are unaware, Drug Action Week is an initiative of the Alcohol and other Drugs Council of Australia, the national peak body for alcohol and other drug sectors in Australia. The aim of Drug Action Week is not only to generate community awareness about harm related to alcohol and other drugs and but also to highlight the solutions that communities can use to tackle these difficult issues. One way Drug Action Week assists in achieving this is through public activities organised by alcohol and other drug agencies.

Each day of Drug Action Week is given a theme to help focus the activities over the week. This year, the theme days are dedicated to prevention treatment for young people, indigenous issues, drugs and the law and drugs in the media. Last year's Drug Action Week saw over 160 activities being held nationwide with open days, seminars and launches.

This year a number of activities have been planned for the ACT to coincide with the different theme days, including a bus tour of major service providers, a central information venue for all our service providers to provide information to the public on a range of issues, promotion of the opiate program by the ACT Division of General Practice, a drugs and the law public forum to be held by the local organisation, Families and Friends for Drug Law Reform and the launch yesterday, Tuesday, 25 June, of Lesley's Place, a pre and post-detoxification support service run by the Toora Single Women's Shelter, which Ms Dundas referred to.

The information venue highlights the importance of education to prevent drug-related harms, and the launch of Lesley's Place by Toora was a nationally reported activity that indicated the need for a range of flexible treatment services. Friday's public forum on drugs and the law will underscore the way in which innovative legal approaches are also a key factor in appropriate responses by government to the problems associated with drug use and dependency in the community.

Drug Action Week is just that—a single week for us to focus our attention—but it should be remembered that the hard work across all sectors involved in minimising drug-related harm continues all year round. The government is proud to put forward a number of new initiatives to assist health, community, education and law enforcement workers in the important work of minimising drug-related harm in the community.

In yesterday's budget we announced the allocation of funds, through an existing service provider, for indigenous-specific detoxification beds. As I promised, I will be announcing in the near future the establishment of an alcohol and other drugs task force, which will bring together representatives of the health, community, education and law enforcement sectors to help develop the strategic directions for alcohol and drug services in the ACT. This is in addition to the broad range of services that are already available to address the harms associated with drug use and dependency, ranging from education to methadone detoxification and rehabilitation and from the needle and syringe program to parent support services and counselling.

Before concluding, I will refer to some other aspects of the debate occurring in the community on drugs and drug use in Canberra. Indeed, I released just recently some figures in relation to drug use patterns in the ACT as a result of a drug user survey that was undertaken last year. It is the most up-to-date information that we have about illicit drug practices within the Canberra community.

The survey confirms that the use of heroin has dropped significantly within this community. The quite dramatic reduction in the use of heroin is mirrored by an increase of about 25 per cent in the price of heroin and a fall in the purity of heroin available in the ACT. Other information available to us, for instance from emergency services and the ambulance service, is that there is a significant reduction in the ambulance call-out rate. This signifies that there is less heroin injecting behaviour, as a result of which there are dramatically fewer overdoses than we experienced 18 months or two years ago.

26 June 2002

We might think that that is all good news, and at one level it is. It is good news to the extent that there have been far fewer drug overdoses and, as a result, far fewer drug overdose deaths in the ACT this year—and certainly fewer last year than in the year before. We can be thankful for that.

Interestingly, though, for governments, policy makers and this Assembly, what the latest drug use survey also reveals is that the reduction in the use of heroin has simply been matched by an increase in the use of other drugs. If one looks at the statistics that are revealed, in terms of drug use, behaviour and habits, one finds that the reduction in heroin use has been accompanied by an almost exact increase in the use of cocaine and meta-amphetamines.

We also know, just from the statistics that we maintain, for instance, at the needle and syringe program—let alone from the advice available to drug workers here in the ACT—that the level of injecting behaviour is almost precisely what it was when the pre-existing levels of heroin were available on the streets. For instance, we know that over the last 12 months 650,000 to 670,000 syringes were dispensed in the ACT as against 700,000 in the previous year, when there was a greater level of heroin around. There has been a decline of 7 or 8 per cent in the number of syringes dispensed, and we can perhaps seek to make some judgments around that.

The point I am making is that there is as much injecting behaviour going on, but it is different substances being injected. That leads to different behaviours and requires different responses, and as a consequence of that we need to base all of our approaches and responses to illicit substance use and drug addiction on the best evidence available. That is why we must be progressive in our responses to drug use; it is why we must be open to other responses; it is why I continue to support a national heroin trial. I remain in communication with other states in relation to that issue, and I will update the Assembly on that at some time in the near future, hopefully.

The government also persists with a consideration of the possibility of an injecting facility being developed in the ACT. We do not resile from our support for that. I acknowledge that injecting behaviours in the ACT have changed—they have changed, and perhaps different responses are required in relation to treatment—but the essential issue remains the same. It is appropriate in Drug Action Week that I acknowledge that the ACT government continues to be committed to exploring a broad range of possible responses to substance abuse and drug addiction within this community.

I will conclude by highlighting some of the issues produced by the change in substance use to meta-amphetamines and cocaine. It does produce very different behaviours in users. The police report to me that they have considerable extra difficulty as a result of the more aggressive behaviour that is often an incident of injecting meta-amphetamines or cocaine. We need to be constantly aware of the needs of drug workers and the need for innovative and aggressive solutions.

Whilst there is a view, which concerns me to some extent, that the tough on drugs approach has led to the reduction in heroin, I do not think it is the case at all. I think there is a range of other factors that have led to the non-availability of heroin. The tough on drugs or border protection issues certainly play a role; the increase in police and customs

activity certainly plays a role. But I do not think they are the most significant of the roles played.

It is good that this important issue is raised from time to time, and I support it being raised today, allowing us to continue to discuss it.

**MS TUCKER (4.05):** There are three aspects to this issue worth picking up in the discussion on treating drug dependence as a health issue: where drug dependency fits on the spectrum of substance use and abuse, the support we offer people dependent on drugs and the organisations that work with them, and the forging of a common community-based understanding of the changes we need to make in law and policy.

Many substances we consume damage our health—from fat to tobacco, from prescription drugs to illicit drugs. Of those, it is probably only tobacco that inevitably damages our health, although drug dependence creates its own health issues. The fact is, however, that we do not really make an uncluttered choice about what substances create problems for us or whether or not we become dependent on drugs. It is a much more complex social and psychological process.

One of the first steps in addressing these issues lies in education. We cannot just label some substances good and some substances bad and encourage children to say no to the bad ones. Such an approach misses the point and does not work. It is only through providing less judgmental and more informative material that young people will be able to have a realistic appreciation of the impact of their actions. In that context, the approach encouraged by our Prime Minister, while popular in the eyes of some, is undoubtedly counterproductive.

The other starting point is early intervention: realistic support for young people and their families, not in regard to drugs specifically but in areas such as employment, housing and mental health. It is through such community support and by encouraging resilience through community engagement that people will develop the capacity to steer away from substance problems such as drug dependency.

In regard to supporting people dependent on drugs, there is a lot more we can do in Canberra. Obviously, the supply of clean needles has a dramatic health impact, and we should be grateful that we live in a country which was sufficiently progressive when AIDS appeared to deal with the disease as a public health issue and not a moral issue.

At a more fundamental level, however, people dependent on drugs face a wide range of very basic health care issues. The shortage of bulk-billing doctors is a very clear case in point. While the problem stems from the Commonwealth health policy, the onus remains on the ACT government to provide better access for people without the capacity to pay to see a GP or, of course, to see mental health counsellors if that is necessary. Dual diagnosis is a major feature of the incidence of substance abuse.

The Civic-based program of free food for the most marginalised people in Canberra, including those with drug dependencies, is run by charities with inadequate facilities. If members spend any time with services that provide free food, they will find that there are quite a number of people using that service who have a mental health problem as well. This is the case right across Australia. The de-institutionalisation of people with mental

26 June 2002

illness was not accompanied, unfortunately, by adequate community health support. Therefore, I am ashamed to say, they are highly represented in places where emergency relief is provided, as well as in our prisons.

Organisations such as Directions ACT, who provide wide-ranging support for people dependent on drugs, are in inadequate and unacceptable accommodation. That brings me to the question of how much we respect the work of non-government service providers. In fact, one of my concerns about this budget is that we have seen public servants recognised in terms of accommodation increases, but we are not seeing the same respect and consideration given to non-government workers.

Slightly off the topic—but not really—in looking at how we provide pay increases across the public service, there is a case for making pay increases according to the level of salary. I get really concerned when we see across-the-board pay increases because there is a huge gap between the lowest and the highest paid in the government sector and public service. It would seem to me much more equitable and fair for increases, if there are any, to take into account the salary. Surely the person on \$27,000 a year needs a salary increase more than the person on \$90,000. If we did that, perhaps we could use some money to support the non-government sector so that they can start to catch up in terms of salaries and conditions.

When the ACT government sells off large blocks of land in Canberra city, it does not ensure that the most marginalised people and the organisations who provide them with support are properly considered in the planning and development. I am talking particularly about the Bunda Street development, of course. In order to address the problems associated with drug dependence, the ACT government needs to value the community sector more highly and take these needs into account in planning and service delivery.

Finally, the question is: where do we go from here? The Canberra community needs to forge some kind of common agreement about the scale of the problems. It is not simply a question of government putting in place the right programs; we need to share an understanding, community wide, of what is necessary. I would argue that we need to look at trials of medically supplied heroin and medically supervised injecting rooms, among other strategies, to assist people dependent on drugs. We need to embrace a wide-ranging program of drug law reform and unpick some of the unhelpful and unhealthy links between crime and drugs of various kinds.

I totally agree with what Mr Stanhope said: when you look at the statistics for heroin use, you see the level of injecting that is occurring. The use of ecstasy in our communities is pretty well acceptable now across a lot of the culture of young people. Education is critical, and the education that works—this is through conversations I have had with young people and first-hand stories; I know it is anecdotal, which is why we want a substance abuse task force—is when they see the impact of taking too many Es and what that does to your body.

There are some suggestions that young people have been talking about for quite a long time—certainly the time I have been in the Assembly looking at these issues—which have not been adequately picked up. Some of the non-government service organisations understand that; they work with the reality every day. But, unfortunately, policy makers

and decision makers are still out of touch with that reality, and that is why the substance abuse task force has to be community based and is so critically important to finding solutions which are relevant.

I can assure members that there is a lot of wisdom in the community. A lot of young people know that it is not okay to be taking lots of drugs and that it hurts. They have got an idea of how we can get that message across, and it is not through zero tolerance. They laugh at that as a solution.

Therefore, before going on with developing the programs, we need to bring players together and get a real analysis of the extent of the whole substance abuse problem in our society. We hope to see a community-based substance abuse task force put together, and I remind government that that idea came out of a community forum in the reception room of this place. That idea did not originate with me or with a member of this place; it came from those in the community who work with the issues of substance abuse. I sincerely hope that this government does create a substance abuse task force that reflects that community wisdom.

Issues of indigenous people have been addressed in the budget a little bit. I applaud and commend that, although there is a lot more work to be done with indigenous people on that. I believe we need to be open and progressive, and we need to be compassionate and forgiving. We need to demonstrate that as a society we are capable of caring for those who are severely disabled by substance abuse—as well as being brave enough to look at the big philosophical and social questions that come up when we look at substance abuse in our society.

**MR SMYTH (4.14):** Mr Speaker, this is a matter of great public importance, and we thank Ms Dundas for putting it on the notice paper today. Given that it is Drug Action Week, it is appropriate that we in this Assembly indicate that we take the issue very seriously.

I have said before that a broad view is required when addressing this issue. At one end of the spectrum are education and prevention; at the other end of the spectrum are enforcement and how the police deal with drugs; and squarely in the middle is treatment—how we help somebody, once they are on the treadmill of drug abuse and drug dependence, deal with the issues they face. The issue might be an individual finding himself or herself using drugs and the effect that has on family and friends.

To combat that effectively we need a broad range of options, as other speakers have said quite effectively. We need to meet people where they are at rather than saying that they need to conform to what it is we wish to offer. Reflecting upon last year's budget, in which there were numerous programs that we put together as a government, there was additional public methadone clinic funding, there was a drug and alcohol family skills-based program for parents and we put another \$2.17 million over three years into community-based packages.

It is not just illicit drugs we need to talk about; we need to talk about tobacco and alcohol—and perhaps caffeine. Youth smoking is of grave concern. Whilst smoking is going down amongst young men, it is still on the rise amongst young women. We need to stop teenagers from taking up the habit of smoking and assist those who have taken up

26 June 2002

tobacco to get off it. We need to support community groups; that is why ADFACT was funded. At the same time we funded the residential youth withdrawal beds that we put together with the Ted Noffs Foundation. We had a very broad view about the way we should approach this issue.

There are a couple of initiatives in the government's budget this year that I applaud, particularly the indigenous youth alcohol and drug project. It is very important that we are culturally sensitive to the needs of various groups, and it is particularly amongst indigenous youth that there are needs to be met. The pharmacotherapy subsidy to community pharmacists helps with the methadone program. Many of our pharmacists are the face of public assistance for drug users collecting their methadone, so it is important that we back up our community pharmacists in the job they seek to do.

Whether you are a parent in Canberra or a parent in Lisbon, you have to take stock of what is going on around you and create an environment that reduces the reasons for people to take up drugs. At the health committee the other day, Rich Eckersley, from the epidemiology centre at the ANU, said that it was incredibly important that young people, through the education system, are taught values to help them form a "moral compass", so that they have direction, guidance and the ability to resist these temptations or, if they do succumb, the ability to find a path out. He saw in the education system the teaching of comparative religion, philosophy and other mental disciplines as there for people to draw on and develop what he called their own "moral compass". I am sure Mr Pratt will have a few words to say about how we, through education programs, can help to arm our young ones against drug abuse.

I conclude by thanking Ms Dundas for putting this on the notice paper and bringing to the attention of members that Drug Action Week is on, in case they did not know. I am sure they all did because we all take this issue seriously, even though the ways in which we might address the issue vary from one extreme of the spectrum to the other. The important thing is that we continue to talk about drugs in the Assembly, continue to highlight to the community the danger of drugs of dependence and continue to be advocates for those affected, making sure that they get access to appropriate and proper treatment so that we can work towards becoming a drug-free society.

**MR CORBELL** (Minister for Education, Youth and Family Services, Minister for Planning and Minister for Industrial Relations) (4.19): Mr Speaker, I join in thanking Ms Dundas for raising this issue during Drug Action Week. The debate today provides the Assembly with the opportunity to focus on the way government and non-government agencies work together, not only on the treatment of those who are drug dependent but also on the early intervention and prevention programs we have in place.

Earlier this year a matter of public importance on drugs in schools was discussed and I advised members of a range of drug education programs currently operating in ACT schools. I pointed out then that drug use is an issue for the whole community; it is not isolated to the health sector, the criminal justice field, our schools or our homes. The comments the Chief Minister made on the holistic approach this government adopts on this issue highlight our view that drug use is not restricted to one part of the Canberra community.

Within the education sector, the drug education framework for ACT schools was implemented in 1999. It addresses harm reduction, health promoting schools, protocols for managing drug-related incidents in schools and the administration of prescribed medication policy. The drug education project for school communities in the ACT is recognised as a cross-sectoral, comprehensive program providing effective drug education for all schools—government and non-government—in the ACT.

Additionally, grants were provided to four schools through this program to engage kindergarten to year 7 and year 10 students in a process of formal learning about health and drugs. The process included innovative learning programs and provided parents and carers with the opportunity to transfer drug education to the home through critical conversations with their children.

The DIRECTIONS@College program has successfully operated in a number of colleges. Government health and education agencies support this program, providing a drug referral information centre worker to visit each college in an outreach capacity for several hours each week.

Over 20 drug summits have been conducted in the Canberra region through the local school community drugs summits program. These are based on a whole school community approach and have successfully engaged many students, parents and community agency workers in these drug-related education programs.

Professional development for teachers is also conducted through the drug education project for school communities in the ACT. This includes assistance in using information technology to deliver effective drug education in schools; a teacher support package to provide a kindergarten to year 12 drug education curriculum; a training package for primary called *Smoke screen: a smoking prevention resource*; and information on how to become a health promoting school (kindergarten to year 12). There have also been workshops on drug policy development.

It is important that drug education programs are developed to respond to the developmental needs of and the lifestyle differences among students. We need to tailor programs to the target group and its stages of development. The needs of primary school students are very different to those of high school or college students. For example, a program on safe injecting delivered at high schools is very different to one on syringe safety delivered to primary school students, and appropriately so.

Evaluation of drug education programs is a current focus at the national level. Evaluation of the National School Drug Education Strategy has commenced. Outcomes will inform future areas of development for drug education programs in schools and the broader community. Recent research conducted in the ACT through this program has revealed that more parents are attending drug education programs conducted by a number of schools. Further work needs to be done nationally on the validity of externally delivered drug education programs. Guidelines for accessing externally sourced drug education programs in the ACT are outlined in the framework.

26 June 2002

The ACT government funds a range of other drug education initiatives for children, young people at risk and parents, right across our community. We need to continue to work together—within the health sector, with the police and the courts, in our schools and as parents—to find solutions to the problem of drug misuse and abuse.

This is an issue of significant concern to young people, parents and children in the ACT education system. For this reason I have put the issue of drug education and the adequacy of existing arrangements on the agenda of the next Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs—the MCEETYA meeting—which will take place in July this year. We need to enhance research into young people's attitudes and views and on the most effective forms of drug education in the prevention of increasing drug experimentation and usage by school students. I hope that by raising this matter at the ministerial council meeting we can continue the focus at a national level.

We should be aiming to strengthen our young people's resolve to make positive lifestyle choices. Understanding the issues of self-worth and self-image is essential to young people's understanding and knowledge of the dangers associated with drug use. A key component in effective drug education has to be a multi-agency approach incorporating the views of health and justice professionals in the development and delivery of drug education programs.

As the Chief Minister pointed out, the government has allocated funding in this year's budget to a program for young members of the indigenous community with alcohol and drug problems. Community pharmacists will provide pharmacotherapy services, and they will receive additional support. There will be \$170,000 in recurrent funding to develop indigenous specific detoxification beds, with mainstream service support, and \$130,000 in recurrent funding to increase the payment provided to pharmacists who participate in the ACT pharmacotherapy scheme.

Also, research shows a strong connection between substance abuse and mental health. This budget has provided extra funding in this area for young people—for example, the expansion of the child and adolescent mental health services, the Calvary day program and the mental illness education program to be run in schools.

It is also worth adding that this year's budget includes significant funding for the establishment of Youth Interact, a project to engage young people in policy making and decision making that affects them and to assist in forming government decisions. The Youth Interact project is another useful forum for engaging young people in issues that affect them and, particularly in relation to drug use, for getting the most informed and direct advice from young people themselves about how we should address the ongoing issue of drug use in our community.

**MR PRATT (4.27):** Mr Speaker, I rise in my capacity as shadow education minister to talk about our youth. I thank Ms Dundas for her MPI. I think it is useful for this matter to be raised, and I support the approaches that she is taking. She is absolutely right: drug dependence is a health issue. There is no question about that.

To that end, I was pleased to see that the government has put some money aside for detoxification capability, although a lot more is required. We know we have only got a handful of detoxification beds in the ACT, and this capability needs to be expanded. I commend the work that the organisation Bridge Back to Life is doing in its endeavours to pursue detoxification capability.

Intervention in schools needs to be undertaken to get to children who are addicted or who have habits approaching addiction. Again, those are health community strategies that need to be employed.

In this Drug Action Week, let's also remember that, along with treating drug dependence as a health issue, prevention strategies are also extremely important. Prevention strategies and education must commence at home. Our families have got to take responsibility. Our children have got to be taught to take responsibility for the actions that they may take.

Of course, these strategies and this education must also occur in schools. Our schools are our front line in prevention and education. Surely the community must be looking at how we can break the cycle that exists in this insidious drug war. Can we break the cycle before our children and our youth become drug dependent? Prevention is very important.

I have talked before about intervention and assertive strategies being commenced in schools and the need to ramp up our drugs education policies in schools. I do not need to go through that now chapter and verse. I am on the record. The *Hansard* will indicate the sorts of steps that I would like to see taken, and I will continue to encourage the government to ramp up its drugs education strategies in schools.

I was a bit surprised to hear the criticism levelled by Ms Tucker at the Prime Minister for his tough strategy stance. Those tough strategies are significant but are only one part of a broad range of measures the government is undertaking. The federal government has a broad range of strategies, of which the toughest are just as important as harm minimisation strategies.

Let's also remember the last ASSAD report, which indicated no improvement over the last four years in relation to drug-taking in schools. Our prevention and education strategies have not been working, and I continue to call upon and encourage the government to overhaul the current policies. The government is introducing some strategies; that is a good and a positive step. I urge the government to continue down that path, but our strategies need to be dramatically ramped up.

Ms Dunne is right: drug dependence is a health issue. I support those approaches that she has taken. There is no way we can criminalise people who are addicted. We need to reach out to our children and our youth and all those who are dependent. We need to deal with them in a compassionate, sensitive and intelligent way. However, I remind the house that prevention in education is just as important as those health strategies. If we can break the cycle before addiction in order to minimise the application of those health strategies, surely that is also important.

**MS GALLAGHER (4.32):** I, too, thank Ms Dundas for bringing this to the Assembly as a matter of public importance. Drug Action Week 2002 has been an excellent opportunity to draw attention not only to the problem of substance addiction and abuse but also to the many community organisations and individuals who confront the real issues every day and deal with people with seriously degraded health and life prospects due to drug addiction.

National Drug Action Week is also an opportunity for policy makers to recognise the enormity of this issue, the need to adopt policy initiatives that recognise substance dependency fundamentally as a health issue and the importance of relating policy not to ideological rhetoric but to the very real need people have for the protection and support of government in dealing with and overcoming dependency.

ACT Community Care workers offer the best standards possible in promoting awareness to drug users of the hazards of all types of drugs and highlighting the health rather than criminal implications of drug use. We should not forget the serious implications of tobacco and alcohol abuse when educating all sectors of the community on the harmful and addictive substances that damage the health and wellbeing of individuals, family and the community.

The ACT's health services run a number of programs to address substance abuse. These include information and advice services, withdrawal services, access to methadone and other pharmacotherapies, case management, counselling and needle and syringe exchange services.

The COAG agreement brought many other community organisations into diversion strategies to remove people from the criminal justice system and treat their issues correctly—as health issues. These community organisations provide a range of treatments to divert dependants away from criminal sanction, recognising the medical basis of drug dependency and the social obligation of government and community to provide an alternative to imprisonment. The workers in these areas perform their work admirably and are deserving of our acknowledgment during this national Drug Action Week.

In looking at the treatment of drug dependence as a health issue, we need strategies that address the socio-economic causes of substance dependency. I am not confident at all that the federal tough on drugs policy does this. We need to acknowledge as a community the significant impact homelessness, poor education, lack of employment and inadequate social support networks have on the users of drugs. By looking into the social causes of drug dependency rather than having a narrow focus on an outcome of drug dependency—criminal activity—we can begin to implement appropriate preventative strategies grounded on empirical evidence and not moral judgment.

Consideration of these issues complements a health-based approach to drug use and expands the scope of policy to target not just individuals who may be in need but also communities that may suffer high rates of dependency because of socio-economic conditions. Good governance requires the addressing of this issue. Being tough on drugs does not do this. The federal government policy of being tough on drugs has resulted in \$213 million in funding being earmarked for supplier reduction measures—and I quote:

... giving Commonwealth law enforcement agencies extra resources to enable them to effectively protect Australia's borders and its community from illicit drugs.

Attempts at addressing the supply of drugs have resulted in larger and larger drug seizures, which is to be commended. However, it has not reduced the rate of drug dependency, as a statement from the federal government's own strategy admits. I quote:

It is not possible to ascertain the exact total cost of illicit drug use to the Australian community. Some components can be measured directly, such as government expenditure specifically sourced from the National Illicit Drug Strategy, but many of the social costs borne by the community, such as the extra cost of welfare, health, and law and order services, can only be estimated. In addition, a number of costs associated with illicit drug use are not quantifiable, such as pain and suffering resulting from a reduced quality of life.

National Drug Action Week is the appropriate time to recognise that being tough on drugs does not recognise the depth of the problem in Australia, nor does it provide a coherent framework for the allocation of government moneys or policies. Only with the recognition of the empirical evidence concerning substance use can a real government strategy, with a national approach, be developed.

So let's recognise the work of our agencies and community groups in the ACT who carry out this difficult work. Let's also work towards a policy framework that gives them the recognition they deserve on a continuing basis by recognising the real needs of the people they assist.

**MR SPEAKER:** The time for discussion on this matter has expired.

## **Brindabella—election commitments**

Debate resumed.

**MR SMYTH** (4.37): Mr Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise and talk about the electorate of Brindabella, look at the government's commitment and the wonderful speech we had this morning from Mr Hargreaves about what they have done and what they have achieved.

Ms Dundas made a very appropriate point about the important use of time here in the Assembly and these self-congratulatory motions—that really there should be no place for those in this Assembly. Let us go to the essence of what Mr Hargreaves contended.

Mr Hargreaves in point (3) (1) says that the Labor Party welcomes the early delivery of election commitments such as investing in Brindabella schools via the abolition of the \$27 million free bus travel scheme. Mr Speaker, there is about \$19 million allocated. There is about \$6 million, \$7 million or \$8 million to come. I wait to see how that will be spent in Brindabella.

It is important that we have a good education system and it is important that it is well funded. The credit goes to Mr Stefaniak, who gained the accolade for having established the most significant educational achievement in the history of self-government, when he started the move to reduce class sizes. We congratulate Bill on that.

26 June 2002

The next important thing Mr Hargreaves contends in the keeping of the election promises is the establishment of the affordable housing taskforce. Yes, affordable housing is important to the people of Brindabella. I wonder where, under point (b), the comment on conveyancing is, because it was in their election promises that the cost of conveyancing would go up. I cannot find it anywhere.

I am sure that, given their commitment to honesty, openness and transparency, somewhere in the announcements the Labor Party made in the lead-up to the election, acknowledgments were made about car rego, parking charges and conveyancing, all of which affect the people of Brindabella. I cannot find them, so perhaps Mr Hargreaves will stand and tell us how honest, open, and transparent their announcements were, now that we know how they will fund their promises.

Much is made in point (c) of the funding major public infrastructure projects in Brindabella. Mr Speaker, if you go to BP3 and look for the capital works, oddly enough these are all old announcements. These are things we foreshadowed in budget paper 3 last year, either with cash for feasibility studies and expected cash in the outyears for establishment and construction, or they are projects which commenced in the year 2001-02.

However, I will give credit where credit is due—something of which Mr Hargreaves' little speech this morning was quite bereft. Some of the initiatives coming up for Brindabella include an oval. There is money for the oval at Chisholm, which I personally believe is a very good thing. The unfortunate thing is that it has been delayed by planning concerns for some time. It is only now that that has been resolved—upon the successful resolution of the issues—that groups like the Valley Vikings are willing to commit to the funding of the oval.

That one is simply a process of time. Yes, there is \$370,000 in the next year and then in 2003-04 there is another \$95,000—well done. I think that is a tremendous achievement. The other one is the redevelopment of the Karralika facilities at Fadden and Isabella Plains. There are four design proposals to the value of \$300,000. Mr Speaker, every single other initiative touted by this government can be found in our budget papers from the previous year.

I think people should give credit where credit is due. As projects have come due, we have moved on to the next stage of the project. The missing link between Taverner Street and Erindale Drive was accomplished this financial year. With the project to build the next section between Erindale Drive and Isabella Drive, that work was already under way. It was through the planning stage—and there is money in the budget. Much is made of it, but credit where credit is due, Mr Speaker.

We then go on to (d). This is the one I really like. I hope Mr Hargreaves has got his election commitments with him so he can point out where this one is, because (3) (d) reads that they welcome the early delivery of election commitments such as opening the new child and youth dental facility in Tuggeranong.

I am sure he will be able to show me where that was one of their election commitments because, oddly enough, it is in this year's budget. It is a previous Liberal government announcement—a Michael Moore initiative to upgrade an ageing facility. I am sure it is

in your election platform somewhere, Mr Hargreaves. I am sure you will be able to table it and show the Assembly where it is, now that you have started taking credit for things which started before the election. Hey, that is great! I am all for that—you go for it!

Point (d) goes on to developing sustainable public transport options for Brindabella residents. Again, where is the mention of car regos and parking charges? You said you would develop these options. In the spirit of those constantly used words—honest, open and transparent—where is the document? I know you will table it, Mr Hargreaves, because I am sure it is there somewhere. You will table, in your policy, your commitments to raising car regos and putting parking charges on the people of Tuggeranong.

We resisted putting parking charges on the people of Tuggeranong. Outlying areas like Tuggeranong and Belconnen have struggled over the years. The Hyperdome at Tuggeranong had a very rough patch when it first started and it is coming good and it is a worthwhile thing. But now you have slugged it. You have kicked them, and you did not tell them you were going to do it. I am sure that, when you conclude, Mr Hargreaves, you will show us where “developing sustainable public transport options for Brindabella residents” contains the commitment to car regos going up and to parking charges being put in place for your constituents.

Under public transport options, you also talked about the Downer to Woden cycle path. That again is an election commitment—and yes, you have kept it. Except, in the Gerritsen review, it says that, over the two years it would take to construct it, \$1.75 million would be needed. Lo and behold, what is in the budget? We find \$2.5 million. We said at the time, “You have underdone this one; there will not be enough money.” And look—we were right. This is another election commitment that has been broken—that the Downer to Woden cycle path would cost \$1.75 million for construction. Yet again we see a flaw.

It then goes on to point (f)—creating additional police positions. I guess there is a bit of contention over police positions, because it is hard to know whether there are 20 or 30, whether they will appear, when and where, and then what they will actually do.

It is quite interesting that it is announced in the government’s press release that there is \$675,000 or thereabouts for extra officers. That covers about seven police officers—but then there is a new DNA unit. My memory is that these extra officers would be out in the streets, but I suspect they will be used to staff the DNA unit. That means yet another broken promise. If there is a promise to put them on the street, you put them on the street. We would like that broken promise to be fixed, because it is particularly important.

**MR SPEAKER:** Order, members! Mr Smyth had the floor a moment ago, and he is just about to get it back.

**MR SMYTH:** If you want to pat yourselves on the back for commitments, you had better check to make sure you have kept them—not half, or sort of, kept them, but whether you have actually kept them.

26 June 2002

If you read point (3)(g) in its entirety, it says it welcomes the early delivery of election commitments such as committing more field staff in Brindabella parks and reserves. This morning we had a wobbly explanation from Mr Hargreaves as to how they were going to get more folks out of the office and into the field. So is there more staff or not?

I thought I would go to the press releases—it has to be in the press releases somewhere. But, lo and behold, when you find the press release that talks about the environment, it does not mention more staff. I have just found it. It says that the ACT government is committed to a sustainable bush capital. No matter where you look, it is here, it is there, it is everywhere—but there is no staff.

I thought, “I know where it will be. The extra staff that they were so keen on will be in the Department of Urban Services ownership agreement, because it has the staff chart.” Where are all these extra rangers and staff hiding, Mr Speaker?

I go down my list and I see “Rangers 2001-02 FTE—rangers 30.5.” I look across in expectation of finding all these extra rangers. Under “2002-03 FTE” there are only 30.5 rangers. We have rangers that do not exist—but they are coming to save the environment!

It is interesting that the staffing profile for urban services goes down, in 2001-02 full-time equivalents, to 1,297.3 staff. There are 1,288 full-time equivalents in the 2002-03 budget. I am confused, Mr Speaker. There are all these extra rangers. We had that leak last week that the rangers are coming—there are extra staff in the field! However, they do not exist. When Mr Corbell was the shadow minister, he took great pains to point out to me that, because of additional burdens placed on staff, they were required—but they do not exist.

**MR SPEAKER:** The member’s time has expired.

**MR SMYTH:** These self-congratulatory motions are simply a waste of time.

**MR CORBELL** (Minister for Education, Youth and Family Services, Minister for Planning and Minister for Industrial Relations) (4.48): Mr Speaker, I would like to make a couple of comments in relation to this important motion from Mr Hargreaves.

To start with, it is entirely normal for a member of an electorate to highlight the important initiatives which have a direct impact on the day-to-day wellbeing of people in his electorate. If those people opposite did that a little more, they might be better focused on their jobs. Perhaps they are going to do it—you know, they’re gunna do it!

Mr Hargreaves’ motion draws attention to one very important issue on which I would like to elaborate. Mr Smyth was in the process of giving credit where credit was due, but he did not give credit for the fact that we have saved people catching buses from Tuggeranong—out of the zone which the Liberals put in place—up to 46 per cent on their monthly bus fares. In fact, there is a saving of between 35 and 46 per cent saving on bus fares for people who live in Tuggeranong and are catching a bus to Woden, Civic or Belconnen.

What a significant saving that is, Mr Speaker! Currently, a monthly all-zone bus ticket costs \$136—because of the unfair and discriminatory nature of the Liberals’ zonal bus fare system introduced by that great member for Brindabella, Mr Smyth. It will now cost \$80.50, compared to the \$136 that Mr Smyth imposed on residents in Brindabella. That is a saving of \$56 a month to catch the bus from Tuggeranong to Woden, Belconnen or Civic. That is a significant saving, and one which I think is a real benefit, a real incentive, and a real way of rewarding people who choose to use public transport.

How unfair is the zonal system, Mr Speaker? Melbourne—a city with a population of close to four million people—has no more than five zones, and yet a city with just over 300,000 people has three zones. Who gets penalised the most? The people who live furthest away from the centre of the city! That was the Liberals’ approach to public transport. Slug the people who live in the outlying areas the most—to pay for public transport. Mr Speaker, we are going to make sure that public transport is delivered equitably. Whether you live in the centre or in the outlying areas of the city, away from Civic, you get a fair deal on the bus. One fare anywhere in Canberra.

The other very important point to make is that, for those people who travel only one zone, the price increase is only 10 cents per ride. That is not much to ask when you are delivering significant savings and incentives for people in Belconnen, Tuggeranong and Gungahlin to catch the bus, who get a saving of \$56 on their monthly bus tickets. What a great initiative of this government!

Mr Smyth made a couple of other points. First of all, he said, “Isn’t this outrageous? We’re spending all this money on a DNA unit for the Australian Federal Police. We want coppers on the beat—we do not want a DNA unit.” I have to ask this question: what does a DNA unit do? A DNA unit catches crooks. It is out there catching crooks—identifying offenders and bringing them before the courts. If Mr Smyth thinks that is bad use of public money, I am pleased that he has put it on the record.

The other point I want to make is about committing more field staff in Brindabella parks and reserves. Mr Smyth says, “No more rangers.” This government has injected—my colleague Mr Wood has implemented this very important issue—\$1.5 million extra for nature park conservation activities in the ACT. That is \$1.5 million more than Mr Smyth was able to achieve in all the time he was environment minister. He had only six years to do it—the Liberals had only six years to do it.

**Mr Smyth:** No. I did not have six years.

**MR CORBELL:** You had only three years—okay. The Liberals had only six years, and you had only three years.

**Mr Smyth:** Environment went up every year.

**MR CORBELL:** Did you deliver that sort of increase for environment protection in the ACT? No, you did not, but this government has. This government is delivering \$1.5 million more.

26 June 2002

What does that mean? It means we get rangers, who are currently sitting in offices in Environment ACT doing paperwork, out, working with Landcare groups, park care groups, areas of Canberra Nature Park, Namadgi National Park and Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve. That is what we are doing. We are making sure we use resources wisely and efficiently and that we get qualified ranger staff out in the parks and reserves, working with the local community, instead of sitting in an office doing paperwork and regulatory work. That is what this government is investing in.

That is a significant improvement in the overall reserve management system in the electorate of Brindabella and right around the city, Mr Speaker. Again, that shows how dreadful and lax the previous government was. In six years of the administration—actually nearly seven years—of Canberra Nature Park, they were unable to achieve that kind of increase for nature conservation activity.

That is the record of this government in just seven months, Mr Speaker—significant benefits for the residents of Brindabella. Mr Hargreaves is to be commended for bringing this motion forward.

**MS MacDONALD (4.56):** Mr Speaker, I thank Mr Hargreaves for his motion, and I am eager to speak to it.

As a member for Brindabella, I eagerly awaited yesterday's budget. I was hoping that representations from Mr Hargreaves, myself, and of course Mr Wood, in his joint role as local member and minister, would be taken on board and funded. Mr Speaker, they were funded, and funded handsomely. I wish I had the ability to make Mr Quinlan an honorary member for Brindabella. Apart from those of Mr Pratt and Mr Smyth, I do not think there would be any objections.

My favourite part of yesterday's budget speech was watching the Liberal opposition, but particularly Mr Smyth and Mr Pratt, squirming and turning green, realising that Labor had delivered a very good budget. The pool being run by the Liberals, betting on the size of the deficit, turned out to be a waste of time. The budget is \$6 million in the black, and even the opposition leader this morning had to concede that he agreed with that figure.

Liberal Party jealousy reached epidemic proportions last week when members of the opposition took to the streets of Canberra, madly chasing government members and journalists around the suburbs. It was all too obvious that members of the Liberal Party would do and say anything to put a dampener on budget initiatives.

Mr Smyth has been most vocal. It was laughable last week when he and Mr Pratt turned up in his speeding me-too-mobile, after the announcement of the Drakeford Drive duplication. He was chasing the journalists, stammering, "We were gunna do it! We were gunna do it too!" It was a sight to behold, Mr Speaker.

**Mr Quinlan:** It was a source of much mirth.

**MS MacDONALD:** Indeed. That strategy has become the entire Liberal method for Canberra in the 2002 budget initiatives. The best argument the opposition can come up with to counter any 2002 budget initiatives is to say, "We were gunna do something about it."

Mr Speaker, the Liberal opposition is a team of gunnas. If they are not careful they will find themselves in a copyright battle with the Arsenal Football Club, who believe they have the naming rights to the Gunners.

The Liberal government had six years to do something about many of the problems facing Canberra and Brindabella residents, but did nothing. Repeating Mr Smyth's mantra "we were gunna; we were gunna" does not deliver results, but the Stanhope government investing money and solving problems does.

Good news was bad news last week, as far as Mr Smyth and Mr Pratt were concerned. The people of Brindabella do not think so. In this week's *Tuggeranong Chronicle*, there is a quote from the president of the Tuggeranong Community Council, Rosemary Lissimore, who said that the announcement was terrific for the area. Mrs Lissimore said, "We have waited so long." If the Liberals were still in government, Mrs Lissimore, like the rest of Brindabella, would still be waiting. Mr Smyth and the Liberals do not want to hear the good news though. As far as they are concerned, every silver lining has a dark cloud.

The Stanhope government has gone at a furious pace to deliver election promises to Brindabella. Mr Hargreaves touched on many initiatives during his speech. So extensive was his list that I believe many in this place thought it was exhaustive.

Would you believe, Mr Speaker, that the 2002-03 budget delivers even more to the Brindabella community? A couple of not insignificant items that Mr Hargreaves failed to mention include capital works on the Tuggeranong Leisure Centre pool filtration system worth \$220,000; \$11 million worth of work on the Athllon Drive under the traffic congestion and road safety improvement program, and the Kambah Village refurbishment will be given \$1.5 million out of Canberra Urban Parks and Places.

In 2001, the Labor Party went to the people of Brindabella and Canberra with a set of promises, which we have kept and delivered. For the first time in the history of self-government, voters in a five-member seat elected a third candidate from a party. It is my very great honour and privilege to be the fortunate candidate elected to serve the people of Brindabella. I do so because the Brindabella community gave such strong endorsement to the Labor team—strong endorsement that I remind Mrs Dunne and Ms Dundas that their respective parties did not receive.

Both those members have stood up here today and claimed that certain motions have been a waste of time. Well, Mr Speaker, I believe half of Mrs Dunne's questions in this place are a waste of time but we take them on board anyway.

*At 5.00 pm, in accordance with standing order 34, the debate was interrupted. The motion for the adjournment of the Assembly having been put and negatived, the debate was resumed.*

**MS MacDONALD:** That is extremely poor form and indicative of why the Liberals were rejected in a record swing last year, and why—Ms Dundas—no Democrat candidates were elected in Brindabella. In fact, my primary vote was more than the combined Democrat vote in Brindabella.

**Mr Cornwell:** Modest!

**MS MacDONALD:** That is right. There is no place for modesty in this place. The Chifley residents, and thousands of Canberrans who are committed to waste reduction, would not see the bio-bin trial as a waste of time, Mrs Dunne. Nor would debate on what budget initiatives Brindabella residents are receiving be seen as unimportant to the residents of Brindabella.

I would remind Ms Dundas, the Member for Ginninderra, that the people of Brindabella have a right to know what is in this budget for them and how they will be affected. The Stanhope government was given strong endorsement by the people of Brindabella, Mr Speaker, and their faith has been warranted.

Important and vital spending initiatives in health and education will be of tremendous assistance to the Brindabella community. Immediately upon our election, the Labor government injected millions of dollars into the Canberra Hospital, which services Brindabella and the bulk of the Canberra community. The opposition has spent 24 hours bleating that it is not enough. Why didn't you do something about it when you were in government?

Last week I had the privilege of announcing the first \$1 million for the Downer to Woden on-road cycle lanes. These cycle lanes will be completed by this time next year and provide Tuggeranong and Woden cyclists with the fastest and most direct route into Civic.

Of course, people living on the north side already have the fastest and most direct route south. There were close to a dozen Pedal Power members at the announcement, one of whom said to me, "This is a brilliant announcement. This initiative will change cycling in Canberra forever and give commuters a real choice in getting around." I could not have put it better myself. The Drakeford Drive duplication will make driving easier and will be completed within a year—immediate action following the election.

Nothing is more important to the mums and dads of Brindabella than giving the best health care and education to their young families. This government will spend \$27 million more on education than any government in the history of self-government. In the young and growing suburbs of Canberra's south, this will mean that better facilities will be built and current facilities will be upgraded.

Fifty-five new teachers in the ACT will lower class sizes—another Labor promise delivered. The laptops for teachers program will deliver better-resourced and more capable teachers. Tuggeranong valley, often dubbed "nappy valley" for its large number of young families with kids, has been presented with an education package that begins to address its needs.

Older Brindabella residents have not been forgotten. My suburb of Chifley—as well as Pearce and Torrens—has a slightly older than average age than Brindabella. I am therefore acutely aware of the need to provide extra services and infrastructure for our senior citizens. Older Canberrans, along with disabled people and pensioners, are the most vulnerable members of our society. The Labor government is addressing their

concerns and financing initiatives that are long overdue. Extra beds, more and improved services and new programs from the Stanhope government are in stark contrast to the callous attacks in the federal Liberal budget on these same people.

On radio this morning, Mr Humphries defined the difference between the major parties as being the fact that Liberal governments in Canberra kept the hard-working public servants in the dark about pay negotiations. I say this is indicative of the underhanded way the Liberals operate, rather than any actual difference between Labor and Liberal governments. The difference between us and them, Mr Speaker, is in how we look after our most vulnerable and our most needy.

The Quinlan budget has started addressing the inequities for our disabled and the inequities that our disabled and seniors face. We have made public transport cheaper and provided better health care. That is the difference between a Labor government and a Liberal one, Mr Speaker. That is why the Liberals are back in opposition with a record swing to us. (*Extension of time granted.*) Security is always important to the people of Canberra and I know that the Brindabella community wants a better deal from the government in this regard.

Mr Speaker, the Stanhope Labor government has just delivered 20 extra police to patrol our suburbs and make Canberra a more secure place to live. The commitment of \$5 million for the new Woden Police Station is great news for the Brindabella community, especially the people of South Woden, and indeed to the whole of Canberra. The Liberals claim they were gunna do something about police numbers, but it has taken just six months for Labor to take some action. It has provided in Woden the desperately needed police station.

I referred a few moments ago to Labor keeping the public service in the loop on pay negotiations. Mr Humphries thinks it is admirable to keep our hard-working and loyal public servants in the dark—to treat them with contempt and treat them as fools. Mr Speaker, the public servants were sick of this treatment and it is they who delivered the bulk of the swing away from the Humphries government.

The Stanhope government has been open and honest about how the territory will be run. That includes the treatment, pay and entitlements of our public servants. This budget provides more incentive for our underpaid public servants—underpaid by the former Liberal government—and moves towards bringing them up to pay levels across the rest of the country, especially given the competition in this town from federal public service pay rates, which provide competition and draw away public servants on a regular basis.

The public servants who live in my electorate are appreciative of our moves to look after them now, and also in the future. Moves to secure superannuation and ensure that entitlements are funded should be the most basic of tasks for a government. Guess what, Mr Speaker? The Liberals did not do it!

**Mr Hargreaves:** They were gunna do it!

**MS MacDONALD:** No. I do not think they were gunna do that one.

26 June 2002

Mr Speaker, I will conclude now by saying that I thank my government colleagues for working cooperatively on a budget which delivers results for the whole of Canberra. I certainly want to say thank you to my Labor Brindabella colleagues, who have worked so hard to secure a slice of the 2002 budget pie.

A secure present and future has been gained for the Brindabella community. They now have better sport and recreation facilities. They also have better transport, education and health. A greater sense of security has been delivered to Brindabella. This is a great start for a first budget. I look forward to securing even more sustainable initiatives, infrastructure and services over the rest of the term and beyond.

I commend Mr Hargreaves' motion to the Assembly.

**MR PRATT** (5.09): Mr Speaker, I have listened to the self-aggrandisement exercise by the Brindabella ALP party machine occurring on the other side of the chamber.

The ALP talks about transparency in government. We have not seen that at all, and indeed the residents of Brindabella have taken a kick in the you know where when it comes to rego, parking and conveyancing. My Brindabella colleague, Mr Smyth, has already listed the many other broken promises and bits and pieces that the ALP are not going to be able to deliver to the residents of the gorgeous valley of Brindabella.

Mr Speaker, I will pick on just those three—rego, parking and conveyancing. We will remember those all through this budget year, to see what action transpires. Will there be action, or is this simply words? Ms MacDonald talked about 20 policemen. That is not correct—effectively, there will be seven policemen. If this is the way the representatives of Brindabella are paying attention to detail, God help the residents of Brindabella!

I will conclude by saying that this budget is not good news for the residents of Brindabella. They have been caught by issues which were not transparently discussed. This will not be a good day for the folk of Brindabella.

**MR HARGREAVES** (5.11), in reply: Mr Speaker, I would like to pick up a couple of things that have been said in the debate so far. I will start with Mr Pratt, because it is really fresh in my mind. He talks about transparency. The voters in Brindabella underwent a big transparency exercise. They looked straight through the Liberal Party because there was nothing in the middle of it to see. Mr Smyth, to his credit, got the greatest number of primary votes in Brindabella, but I will come to that a little later.

**MR SPEAKER:** You will not, if you are going to adhere to the standing orders.

**MR HARGREAVES:** No, Mr Speaker, I am not going to abuse the standing orders at all. I just wonder sometimes whether Mr Pratt knows where Brindabella is, and how far it is from Isaacs to the border.

I will not refer to Mr Pratt's contribution to the Brindabella electoral result, because there was none. I will not refer to his contribution to the people of Brindabella, because there has been none. Perhaps like Gunna Gary over there, he is gunna get around to it. We look forward to that.

It occurred to me today, when I was listening to the prattling on of the people across the chamber, that perhaps the Liberal Party policy unit was born out of the army school of artillery, because they are so full of gunnas.

**Mr Pratt:** Very droll.

**MR HARGREAVES:** Very droll. I am glad to see that Mr Pratt at least has a sense of humour, if not much else.

Mr Pratt ought to do some research when he talks about policing. He ought to do a little more adding-up. Perhaps his calculator is broken, or perhaps he is using one of those Irish ones, with a piece of paper with holes cut in it, and he can only count up to five police officers, without taking his shoes off.

The truth is that 22 new members started with the ACT Police as constables on Monday, 29 April this year. In fact, I am reliably told that another 38 recruits were only recently deployed in the ACT. I am also told that, of those police officers—that is 60—only about three or four are employed in DNA work.

Incidentally, Mr Speaker, it was those members opposite who introduced the DNA legislation when they were gunna do something about it—they were gunna put on police officers to do it. Guess what? They never got around to it! It was the usual story—they never got around to it. In fact, it was this mob opposite that so seriously ran down the police numbers that this Labor government has had to do something about them. Indeed, there will be another 100 recruits specifically deployed in the ACT by December of this year. Mr Speaker, these guys have reality staring them in the face, but they just cannot see it.

**Mr Smyth:** Where is the net gain?

**MR HARGREAVES:** Major Pratt over here talks about the net gain—straight out of the school of artillery! What happened? The net gain? It started on such a low base because you guys ran the whole lot down. I spent three and a half years on your benches arguing the toss with you. You were gunna get around to it eventually, but you never did. Labor has had to do it for you.

Mr Smyth bagged out the schools \$27 million. When are you going to work out, Mr Smyth, that you might have done okay in the base, but your mob lost? The big election issue was the schools \$27 million—and you guys got caned! You got caned like primary school kids. The people of the ACT want the \$27 million inside the school gates, not on the buses. However, Labor is still giving you the buses. You guys opposite ought to get used to it. You are gunna be in the wilderness for some time to come!

Mr Speaker, he talks about the affordable housing taskforce, and he bellyaches about the conveyancing costs. Maybe he is doing his usual little stunt by sticking up for that battling little struggler who wants to buy his 12 investment houses.

I have no problem at all not defending someone who has 12 investment houses. If you want to look at the figures and quote them selectively, just have a look at the big end. These guys over here are defending the poor, poor people who have to buy a house that

26 June 2002

costs over a million bucks. What about the guy who buys it for \$150,000? Go and have a look at the figures, Mr Smyth—he has got a reduction.

Mate, I can read it in the *Canberra Times*, I can listen to the Treasurer talking about it, and I can read it in the documents. Perhaps you ought to get onto one of the school buses, go back to school and learn how to read! I was really chuffed when he said, “Well done.” I thought that was great—I thought that was terrific, Mr Speaker. But he then went on and wrecked it. He was doing so when he said, “Thank you very much to the Labor government for doing good things.” He was really in front of the pack at that point. Then he slid right back down the guts to the back again, when he said, “Every initiative—the Libs were gunna do it.” How many times have we heard that today? But you did not do it.

You talked about the Drakeford Drive thing. For six years, you were gunna do it. Labor did it in six months—bang! It is in the thing—they are going to have the work done. What happened? No! I had to badger you. For three years, I had to badger this bloke, when he was a minister, to try to have at least one complete package. No, he had to go down silly street, see the silly roundabout and correct that silly intersection. What did he do? He threw \$800,000 straight down the toilet. He would have been better off using the \$800,000 to further the design work that was needed to continue the project.

Mr Speaker, he talks about the child health and dental unit as being a previous Liberal idea under Michael Moore’s regime—that nefarious coalition which existed, that strange bedfellow system—the one that had the 40 pieces of silver attached to it. That was their idea, was it?

We salute you for having a good idea. But we do not salute you because you did not actually do it. That is another one of your gunnas, straight out of the school of artillery. Then you go and make a heap of noise about the charges, the parking in Tuggeranong and all those sorts of things. Good on you! They are nothing more than smokescreens.

They are nothing more than smokescreens, and you know damn well that is true. The parking in Tuggeranong—nobody likes it, and nobody has said they like it. This government said they did not like it, but it is going to be done. You are telling me that the people who live in Mr Pratt’s suburb of Isaacs—not in Tuggeranong, not in the three suburbs of South Woden—shop in Woden. Mr Pratt himself shops in Woden and he has to pay for parking. You are saying that other people do not have to do so—and you talk about a party of equity. What absolute rubbish are you!

**Mrs Dunne:** The battlers in Banks will really thank you for that, Mr Hargreaves.

**MR HARGREAVES:** Mrs Dunne, you have arrived in the chamber. I suggest you go back upstairs, take a Bex, have a good lie down, and come back.

Mr Speaker, he has tried to bag the Downer-Woden cycle path. He says there is a problem with the calculations—\$1.75 million. According to my understanding of things today, their funding for the Gungahlin Drive extension would have had it ending in a four-lane highway smack outside the door of the AIS. Good on you! Get your reputation straight before you hit me. Get yourself straight before you come to see me.

Mr Speaker, this man was the Deputy Chief Minister in the previous government. After Trevor Kaine bailed out on him, he was the sole representative of the Liberal Party in Brindabella. He was the sole representative of the Carnell-Humphries Liberal government facing the people of Brindabella in October 2001.

The election result was the electorate's verdict on your work, Mr Smyth—and what a verdict it was! It represents the second time the people of Tuggeranong and south Woden have swung heavily to Labor when Mr Smyth was representing the Liberal Party. The relevance is his right to criticise—he has none. His acceptance in the electorate is zipo.

Mr Speaker, the result was 22 per cent against him in 1996, and 15½ per cent against the Libs in 2001. I would like to know this: is it any wonder the crikey.com website is so full of rumours about Mr Smyth stalking Margaret Reid's Senate seat? They want to be very careful. Your colleagues want to be real careful that your curse does not strike a third time.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

### **Low-income, self-funded retirees—pension benefits**

**MR CORNWELL** (5.21): I move:

That this Assembly calls upon the ACT government to reverse the decision of its Minister for Education, Youth and Family Services, Mr Corbell, not to participate in the federal government's extension of pension benefits to low-income self-funded retirees in the ACT.

Mr Speaker, the background to this motion is that pensioners who exceed either the assets or income test do not qualify for a pensioner concession card but do receive a Commonwealth seniors health card. This health card is available to people of age pension age—65 for men, 62 for women—who do not receive a pension and whose adjusted taxable income is less than \$50,000 (single) or \$80,000 (couple combined).

The seniors health card provided by the Commonwealth offers discount pharmaceuticals and a telephone allowance. The federal government announced in the budget the intention to negotiate with the states to extend these concessions to include council and water rates, utilities charges, public transport and motor vehicle registration.

It was estimated that in the current year the cost to the ACT would be \$3.5 million, of which the federal government would provide \$2.1 million and the ACT \$1.4 million on the 60/40 rule. The Labor Party, of course, know a lot about the 60/40 rule, as that is the rule elsewhere in Australia that their union puppet masters use to control them. I understand that in the ACT they have a 50/50 rule.

Maybe there has been some misunderstanding. I am being generous. When I asked a question in the Assembly on this matter, Mr Corbell said that the real problem was that there was no commitment from the Commonwealth government to match these funds in

26 June 2002

relation to growth. Mr Corbell, that simply is not true, and I believe that there may be some misunderstanding on your part.

You were correct when you said are 5,561 people here would be affected, not the 8,237 I mentioned. The 8,237 was the growth predicted by the federal government for the ACT by 2005-06. Does anybody want more evidence of a commitment to ongoing funding? I can understand why it would not go beyond 2005-06. It is very difficult to predict much beyond that. Certainly, a calculation up to that time has been made, and I believe it demonstrates a commitment.

The other point I find interesting in relation to the ACT government's attitude is that other Labor states have agreed. Western Australia, South Australia and the Northern Territory have all agreed in principle. They jumped at the chance. Others are still negotiating, with the exception of Tasmania, which has an election coming up and is therefore preoccupied with other matters.

The ACT is the only government to reject outright this very generous, just and equitable proposal. The ACT, therefore, will be the only area in Australia where self-funded retirees will be second-class beneficiaries. It is not something that I would wish to carry with me as an elected representative.

I find the attitude of this Labor government inconsistent, given the respite care, psychogeriatric and convalescent services they are providing for the aged in the budget. I commend them for those services. I also find it inconsistent with setting up an advisory council on the ageing. The Chief Minister's media release said:

... our aim [is] to create a community in which older people feel safe and valued and where services are available to meet their needs.

He went on to say:

I will encourage the Council to be forthright in providing advice to Government on older people's issues and needs.

I would suggest the first topic for the advisory council might be to examine this inequitable decision.

Finally, I find this Labor government's behaviour totally contradictory in relation to its own policy. Its older people's policy, on page 61, says:

Labor will ... review and extend if appropriate concessions available to pensioners and low income self-funded retirees from ACT Government agencies.

You cannot get more obvious than that.

I believe there is no question that this move is justified in terms of fairness and equity, as I have already mentioned. For many years we have known about the hardship suffered by people whose income is only just above pension level. Most of them are self-funded retirees. It denies them many pension concessions which the federal government has now generously decided to make available, provided the states cooperate on a 60/40 basis.

I suppose I cannot more graphically illustrate this than by reading comments by the president of the Association of Independent Retirees, Canberra branch, Mr Gosling, who wrote a letter to the minister, Mr Corbell, and was kind enough to send me a copy. He wrote:

On behalf of Members of the Association of Independent Retirees Canberra Branch, I wish to protest at the miserly attitude of your Government towards not providing concessions to fully or partially funded retirees in line with those that are received by pensioners.

You may be unaware that many self-funded retirees are income poor, their incomes during a lifetime of working have been largely invested in the acquisition of the family home and trying to do the best for their families. They rely entirely on income generated from savings and investment, and now struggle to maintain a dignified retirement, and deal with increasing costs for utilities and services ...

There are also people such as my late father, people who worked for the Commonwealth for forty years and are too proud to apply for a part pension when they are entitled to it. In that era, it was expected that a man provide for his family without asking for hand-outs. It is of interest also to note that in the winter appeal for St Vincent De Paul "Self Funded Retirees" are on the list of needy groups.

On the other hand less prudent people who squandered their money during their working years and have little assets apply for a pension. This gives them an income comparable to many retirees but also the advantage of concessions of rental rebates, vehicle registration and licences, reductions in electricity, rates, etc.

This house speaks a great deal about social justice in looking after the needy. It is time to put that social justice commitment into practice yet again and to overturn this mean and shabby decision. I would ask for members' support of my motion.

**MR CORBELL** (Minister for Education, Youth and Family Services, Minister for Planning and Minister for Industrial Relations) (5.31): Mr Speaker, the proposal by the Commonwealth to extend concessions eligibility to Commonwealth seniors health cardholders would appear, and this government believes it is, simply an attempt by the Commonwealth to get the states and territories to pay for its election promises. It is unreasonable for the Commonwealth to make announcements about initiatives that would benefit a certain group in our community and then pay for only half of them. If they are so strongly of the view that funding should be provided, they should be prepared to pay for their commitment in full.

The offer by the Commonwealth to the ACT in March this year was for \$2.1 million in 2002-03 towards the cost of introducing this extension. It is important to note that they were prepared to fund part of the cost of implementing their election commitment. If this government announced that it would fund certain things and asked the Commonwealth to fund the other half, we would be laughed out of court by the Commonwealth government.

Since these figures were provided by the Commonwealth, the number of Commonwealth seniors health cardholders in the ACT has risen. The ACT government carefully considered the request and decided that it would not accept the offer to extend concessions to Commonwealth and seniors health cardholders.

26 June 2002

The real cost to extend the ACT concessions program to a wider range of seniors cardholders would be approximately \$4 million in 2002-03. With the current ageing population in the ACT, the recurrent cost would continue to increase. This would have a significant impact on the ACT's budget—to fund a Commonwealth election commitment. Given our current budgetary circumstances, we are simply not in a position to provide that level of funding.

In the 12 months to June 2001, the number of persons aged 65 years and over in the ACT increased by 3.5 per cent. The Commonwealth's offer relates to holders of Commonwealth seniors health care cards who may have an annual income of less than \$50,000 for singles and \$80,000 for couples combined.

Mr Cornwell said that this was only slightly above the provisions for pension cardholders. I would like to disabuse Mr Cornwell of that. To qualify for a pension card, singles must have an annual income of less than \$29,400. Compare that with the \$50,000 for Commonwealth seniors health care cardholders. The difference is more than \$20,000 per annum. For couples, pension cardholders can have an annual income of less than \$49,000 per annum. Compare that with the \$80,000 per annum for Commonwealth seniors health cardholders, \$30,000 more.

There are also differences in the asset limits for pensioners. The eligibility requirements for pension cardholders impose asset limits, whilst for Commonwealth seniors health care cardholders there are no asset limits. So the level of income is not just slightly higher. It is significantly higher—\$20,000 for singles and \$30,000 for couples—and there is no asset limit.

The ACT government's decision is based on the principle that support and concessions should be extended to those most in need. I do not for a moment doubt that there are self-funded retirees who live in difficult situations. But this is about focusing, as a matter of policy, on those most in need. The difference between \$49,000 per annum for a couple to be eligible for a pension card and \$80,000 for a couple to be eligible for a Commonwealth seniors health card is significant.

I understand that the ACT is not alone in rejecting the Commonwealth's initial offer. Other states have also expressed concern at funding the Commonwealth government's election commitments. I understand that the South Australian decision was made prior to the last South Australian election. So it was a decision taken by the previous Liberal government in South Australia. That may very well be the case for the Northern Territory as well, given the recent change of government there, but I could not be sure of that.

One of the catalysts for the establishment and maintenance of a concessions program here in the ACT, and indeed in any jurisdiction, is to achieve a balance in the standard of living and access to essential services for all members of the community. The ACT concessions program is committed to expenditure support for those most in need—pensioners and health care cardholders. I do not think I need to reiterate the eligibility difference between a pension cardholder and a Commonwealth seniors health cardholder. The difference in annual income, as I have already highlighted to members, is not insignificant.

The Stanhope government is also committed to addressing poverty and disadvantage, and we are taking a strategic approach to meeting this commitment. In particular, we are currently conducting an assessment of concessions, which has involved consultation with people for whom concessions are important, including older people, young people, people with disabilities, sole parents, people from culturally diverse backgrounds, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. We will consider the issues identified through this research and discussion with these groups in the future.

I will give a little more background. The ACT concessions program provides expenditure support for essential services for pensioners, low-income earners, holders of seniors cards and Veterans Affairs gold cardholders in the ACT. I believe it would be fair to say that the significant experience of Veterans Affairs gold cardholders as service men and women entitles them to the highest level of support in our community. That has been a longstanding commitment across Australian politics since the First World War.

The government's approach is a reasonable one in the circumstances in which we find ourselves. The Commonwealth seniors health care cardholders program has significantly higher levels of eligibility in the amount of income couples and singles can receive in a year and it has no assets test. The amount of assets you hold is not relevant to the concession you receive from the Commonwealth program.

The Commonwealth was asking us to extend our concessions program to people with higher potential income levels than pension and health care cardholders and higher levels of assets, because there is no asset test, and they were asking us to pay for half of it. That is not an approach we believe appropriate, particularly given the current budget circumstances this government finds itself in. Therefore, the government was straightforward and honest in its response to the Commonwealth government.

I know that some people will be unhappy about the decision, but I believe it is a reasonable one based on focusing our concessions program on those most in need—people on pensions, people on health care cards, people with a range of disadvantages which make them eligible for assistance. That will be the approach the government continues to adopt in this matter.

**MS DUNDAS (5.41):** I was interested to note that it was in Senate estimates that it became clear that the minister for community services, Mr Corbell, indicated that the ACT would be the first state or territory to block the federal government measure of extending pension benefits to low-income, self-funded retirees. It is true that the federal government made a promise that the ACT public purse would have to wear the cost. This, I would think, is the very heart of the problem.

The states have always funded the concessions relevant to state administration, such as concessions on council rates, transport and car registration. Similarly, many private organisations wear the cost of concessions—cheap footy tickets, discount hairdressing, discount entry to art galleries, even discount membership of political parties as a normal function of their business.

26 June 2002

While it is extremely considerate of the federal government to provide self-funded retirees with the concession card, there is no real precedent for them paying the cost, and any provision of funds would be seen as a one-off bonus. The one-off bonus for this year is for the feds to pay half.

It was reported in the press and repeated in the chamber today that Mr Corbell rejected the compensation offer. The minister said, "With the current ageing population in the ACT, the recurrent cost would continue to increase and would have a significant impact on the ACT's budget." I have not seen what Treasury projections he is working from. Perhaps if we saw the budget projections and how they compare with projections of state grants through the new tax system, we would have a better picture of how taxing the new measures would be.

It is my understanding that South Australia and Western Australia—Western Australia has been under a Labor government for a while now—have indicated that they would introduce the benefit extensions. I wonder whether we should see the Western Australian minister as overgenerous, or is it just a matter of Mr Corbell being Ebenezer Scrooge?

Perhaps we could ask for more money from the federal government, because the Howard government could have and should have paid for the extension of this benefit. We should all remember that in June last year the federal government spent \$600 million, paying \$300 to every older Australian as a cynical grey-vote buying exercise. This money could have easily helped the states pay for the extensions they have promised to concession cardholders.

I am happy to support the motion, and I ask that Minister Corbell be tough in his negotiations with the federal government, as he may be able to get more money from them so that our support of older Australians does not have an onerous impact on the territory's bottom line.

**MS TUCKER (5.44):** The federal government's proposal, as I understand it, is to fund at a ratio of 60:40 the extension of concessions currently available to people on the age pension or with a health care card. Unfortunately, I do not have the exact wording of the proposition.

The ACT government funds concessions for people living on the age pension, which is a pension determined and funded by the Commonwealth government. Mr Cornwell discussed concessions such as those for energy, water, sewerage, rates, car registration, transport and spectacle bills. It is not easy to find out from the website exactly what concessions the ACT government makes available to pensioners, and unfortunately the minister's office could not tell me today either. Perhaps the website could include a search for seniors concessions.

The age pension, a Commonwealth pension, is available on a sliding scale. Full and part-pension payments are available on the basis of an assets and income test. For single people, the part-payment cuts out at an upper asset limit, for a person who owns their home, of \$283,750 and, for a person who does not own their own home, of \$384,750, and an income test \$1,181 per fortnight or \$30,706 per annum.

The Commonwealth seniors health card, a separate system, is available to older people on the basis of an income test alone. Single people may have an income of up to \$50,000. That does not seem to be quite what Mr Corbell was saying, but I have to confess that I am having a bit of trouble. We were getting a lot of different figures in researching for this motion today. Anyway, this latter group is the one to which the Commonwealth government's proposal relates.

Certainly some people who receive a Commonwealth seniors health card are living on incomes just above the cut-off for the pension and are in difficulty. There are people living in difficult circumstances. However, there are other people in the group of Commonwealth senior health cardholders who are quite well off. The problem is not simple, though. The people currently eligible for ACT government-funded concessions are subject to strict asset and income eligibility tests.

It is clear that there is a need to extend the concession. I think the government is right to be wary about the offer. The Commonwealth has not guaranteed its portion of the funding into the future. We do not want to have to remove concessions in the future. However, I understand that the ACT is the only state or territory so far to say no to this proposal outright.

I am told that Western Australia, the Northern Territory and South Australia have all agreed in principle and are negotiating the details. South Australia is waiting till the budget, apparently. It is open to the Commonwealth to adjust the pension entitlement to accommodate the gap, and they are in control of the criteria for pensions.

We did talk to the Council on the Ageing today, and they were not totally supportive of what Mr Cornwell has attempted to do here today. So I feel that I have to express some reservation about supporting this motion. I understand why Mr Cornwell has moved it, and I support his intention, but I do not feel that we have the full picture. There are reasonable concerns that have been expressed already by other speakers.

The Poverty Task Group estimated the Henderson poverty line for a single-income family of two adults and two children in 1999 at \$24,700 per year. That is significantly less than the income cut-off for a single person for the Commonwealth seniors health care card. But that does not mean there is no need to assist people who meet that test.

**MR CORNWELL** (5.48), in reply: I wish the government would make up its mind. The government initially told me that they have rejected this proposal on the grounds of no ongoing commitment from the Commonwealth government. When it was pointed out a little while ago that there was in fact an ongoing commitment, they suddenly changed their tune and started talking about it possibly covering too many people and the difference between pensioner income and self-funded retiree income being quite vast.

First, it is low-income, self-funded retirees we are discussing, not every self-funded retiree. Secondly, whilst the pensioner amount may be significantly less, pensioners also have additional concessions for council and water rates, utility charges, public transport and motor vehicle registration, as well as a pharmaceuticals discount and a telephone allowance. Whilst there may be a difference in the money they receive, there is also a substantial difference in the concessions available.

26 June 2002

This has been an ongoing problem for many years. People are constantly falling between the cracks. It is true that some of them are asset rich, but that does not mean that they are not cash poor, as is often the case. I would therefore ask members to seriously consider going along with this motion.

I cannot comment on whether South Australia made their arrangement before the government changed, Mr Corbell. All I know is that South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern Territory have agreed in principle, and it seems to me that the ACT runs a great risk of finding that our self-funded retirees are the only people in Australia who do not have the extended concessions that have been offered on a very reasonable basis by the Commonwealth. If that is the case, then our self-funded retirees will be second class citizens or beneficiaries. That would be to this territory's eternal shame.

Question put:

That **Mr Cornwell's** motion be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 7		Noes 6	
Mr Cornwell	Mr Smyth	Mr Berry	Ms MacDonald
Ms Dundas	Mr Stefaniak	Mr Corbell	Mr Stanhope
Mrs Dunne	Ms Tucker	Ms Gallagher	
Mr Humphries		Mr Hargreaves	

Question so resolved in the affirmative.

Motion agreed to.

### **Canberra 400 V8 supercar event—contract**

**MS GALLAGHER** (5.55): I move:

That this Assembly calls on the Minister for Economic Development, Business and Tourism to table the contract relating to the Canberra 400 V8 Supercar event.

I am raising this issue today because there is an expectation of politics and of government that there be a base level of clarity and transparency in government actions, especially those that involve the expenditure of taxpayer dollars. The Canberra 400 V8 supercar race is a significant event in the life of the Canberra tourism year. It requires significant works in the Parliamentary Triangle and involves significant expenditure by government. It also attracts thousands of visitors to the ACT and promotes Canberra across Australia and internationally.

It was expected that the race would ultimately generate benefits for Canberra, especially the hospitality industry, but there has been a heated debate recently about whether the benefits of the event warrant the cost of hosting it.

When the contract to host the race was signed in December 1999, it was projected that it would cost \$17 million over five years. Since that time, the costs have increased to \$23 million over five years. Last year the race had an operating loss of \$1.45 million. Ticket sales for 2001 were down on 2000 sales, and it is projected that ticket sales for this year may be further down.

The event lost its sponsor last year, which raised concerns about the viability of the race and led to queries about the nature of the contract to host the event, especially regarding the costs and obligations on the ACT government.

It seems reasonable, therefore, that before this debate goes further and becomes bogged down in inaccuracies and unsubstantiated claims members of the Assembly and the people of Canberra be able to see the terms under which Canberra hosts the race and the extent of the ongoing financial support the ACT government gives to the race.

One of the reasons the contract has remained such a mystery is that commercial-in-confidence clauses have been used to prevent the tabling of contracts. I fully understand the use of commercial-in-confidence clauses where there is a real interest to be protected. Such clauses inspire confidence in businesses when they deal with government that sensitive information will be protected. However, such clauses should not inhibit public scrutiny of government transactions.

This Assembly passed the Public Access to Government Contracts Act in 2000. Although this was after the date of the contract between CTEC and AVESCO, the principle should still apply. That principle is one that, while recognising the importance of businesses being able to protect commercially sensitive information, promotes accountability and transparency in government business, especially when that business concerns taxpayer dollars. As such, commercial-in-confidence clauses should not be used to prevent us from seeing how public money is spent, unless such information is truly sensitive. I cannot imagine that the entire contract with AVESCO is commercially sensitive and, as such, those parts of the contract that are not should be made public.

The contract to host the Canberra 400 V8 supercar race was negotiated and executed by the Liberal government, and now this Labor government has inherited it and is responsible for addressing the situation. A great deal of public money is going into an event hosted over a weekend and now generating debate about whether it is worth the expenditure or whether the money could be better utilised elsewhere.

Meanwhile, the contract that created the commitment in the first place is not on the public books. The way to fix this situation is to table that information and subject the contract to some scrutiny. I am not suggesting that we should be in the habit of disregarding commercial-in-confidence clauses, but for those clauses that are ill considered or overly broad we should not be prevented from seeing how public money is spent.

The Canberra 400 V8 supercar race occurs in my electorate, and I am keen that my constituents—be they for the race, against it or ambivalent about it—have access to the terms under which the race is hosted and funded. The Labor government campaigned on a platform of open and accountable government, and in the interests of those important and democratic principles I ask members to support this motion.

26 June 2002

**MR HARGREAVES** (5.58): The Treasurer has asked for written legal advice relevant to this motion. I understand that that advice has not been received as yet. Therefore, I move:

That the debate be adjourned.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Debate adjourned to the next sitting.

## **Adjournment**

Motion (by **Mr Stanhope**) agreed to:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

**The Assembly adjourned at 5.59 pm.**