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FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY
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Wednesday, 21 September 2005

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Wednesday, 21 September 2005

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

Limitation Amendment Bill 2005

Mr Stefaniak, pursuant to notice, presented the bill and its explanatory statement.

Title read by Clerk.

MR STEFANIAK (Ginninderra) (10.31): I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

Mr Speaker, contrary to what many in the community would like to believe, the terrible fire which came from New South Wales and crossed into the ACT in January 2003, engulfing suburban Canberra without warning, remains a live issue. It needs to be repeated again and again that this terrible fire affected, and continues to affect, many hundreds of people. The firefighters say that they cannot understand why 400 people, not four, died in the fire, such was the speed and intensity of the fire when it finally reached Weston Creek.

It affects the people who were injured that day. Over 200 people were treated for various injuries suffered from the fire. Those who were badly burned continue to bear a daily burden of pain and disability. Some were horribly disfigured. It affects the almost 500 households whose homes were burnt to the ground that day: 491 homes were burnt to the ground. The first houses were burning in Eucumbene Drive before a state of emergency was declared.

One Duffy man described how he looked out his window and saw nothing untoward, but on walking out the front door he saw embers falling into his garden from the sky. As the residents of Canberra went about their business that Saturday, with the usual exodus to the coast for the weekend and others going shopping, looking at property or just relaxing at home, no-one had any idea of what was about to happen. In that case, the Duffy resident was at home without any car transport, as his son had borrowed his car to look at a house he was interested in.

This fellow was lucky because he was able to escape in a neighbour's car. Three elderly people and one mother of three were not so lucky. The people who escaped the flames that devoured their properties mostly did not have time to save a thing. The fire came upon the Weston animal hospital so rapidly that by the time staff became aware of it they had to vacate it without being able to release a single animal from its cage.

Not only was it traumatic for people to have to escape to save their lives, but also some were left with considerable financial losses because the costs of rebuilding escalated to \$1,800 a square metre when standard insurance for the period only covered them for \$1,000 a square metre. That left almost everyone underinsured. Those who were

supposedly overinsured found insurers were still unwilling to pay out. People lost every family photograph they possessed, which meant for many that they ended up without pictures of deceased relatives or of children when they were young. Here we are over 2½ years after the bushfires and the problems for the bushfire victims are ongoing.

Mr Corbell: This is a stunt.

MR STEFANIAK: It is not a stunt. Only 43 per cent have rebuilt. The bushfire victim advocacy groups say that this is because of a number of factors and that they have not received a huge amount of assistance. The result is that people have found themselves set adrift from old contacts and associations and the effect for many has been very traumatic. Ric Hingee, a bushfire victims' advocate, says that there is anecdotal evidence of psychological problems resulting from their moving to areas where they had no ties or support amongst people who had not been affected by the fires. Despite the sentiments of many who were not affected by the fires that it is time to move on, my point is that the people who had personal and financial losses are still suffering. Their suffering has been compounded by the fact that the coronial inquest into the fires is still not concluded.

The fact that this coronial process has been so long drawn out has made the victims of the Canberra bushfires angry that they are still waiting for answers. That has added to the suffering they have endured. But it has also had a practical and potentially ill effect. Whilst up to 100 people are expected eventually to take action against the government and other parties, not all have yet made a decision to sue.

Those people who have suffered losses from the fire have been waiting to see the findings of the coronial inquiry. Keith Baker, for example, told WIN news on 9 September this year, "The findings in the coronial report are going to be very important to the decision that we actually make." Another fire victim, Luciano Quadraccia, also told the WIN journalist, "I was hoping that I'd get information out of the coronial inquest, that I could settle down, read through it carefully and see if there is a case to answer." Mr Quadraccia said, very reasonably, "I don't know who's to blame for any of this. Maybe there is nobody to blame, in which case, let's see what the coroner says."

The problem that has arisen is that the coronial process may well not be completed by the time the statute of limitation for personal injury runs out. That, effectively, will occur on 1 July next year. The purpose of this bill today is to protect the rights of bushfire victims by ensuring that bushfire victims who have suffered personal injury are given extra time to consider legal action after that coronial process is finalised.

At present, the statute of limitation for personal injury claims expires, on my reading of the act, on 1 July 2006. That is because of the Civil Law (Wrongs) Act, which was amended, virtually everyone in this house agreeing to it, back in 2003. If you read that and the Limitation Act, effectively it is now three years and effectively claims run from 1 July 2003.

A number of bushfire victims who have lost their homes and who have suffered as a result of the fires have approached the opposition because they have received legal advice that they may be statute barred because of the current law. The Civil Law (Wrongs) Act was amended in the last Assembly and, as I said, the statute of limitation for personal injury claims was dropped from six years to three years. For property

damage claims, it remained at six. That was in response to the insurance crisis. The time limit for non-personal injury claims, such as property damage, remained at six years.

Unless the law dealing with the statute of limitation is changed, the victims of the bushfires might well be disadvantaged further by the long drawn out saga of the coronial inquiry, thanks mainly to the lengthy appeal processes, which have delayed it for probably a further 12 months. The government has ruled out any commitment to not pursuing unsuccessful plaintiffs for costs in relation to actions before the court. I can understand where the government is coming from there.

This means that people need to consider very seriously whether they will take legal action. As Keith Baker said in the same WIN interview on 9 September, “We are putting our own house at risk a second time, not from the flames this time, but from legal costs if we decide to go ahead and then lose the action.” Bushfire victims, despite having suffered significant losses, are reluctant to take action when the coronial inquiry is still proceeding and face the possibility that they may lose their homes twice, once in the bushfires, for which at least most were insured, and again in the courts, for which there would be no insurance.

Whether or not they do decide to take legal action, it is only just that people who have suffered so much already should have their legal rights protected. It seems to the opposition that, as the full coronial process may still not be completed by the end of the statute of limitation period, which, as I said, on my reading will be 1 July 2006, bushfire victims should have time to consider taking legal action.

The coronial inquest has gone on much longer than I think anyone anticipated and my bill would enable people who suffered personal injuries from the bushfires—and “personal injuries” mean physical injuries and mental harm, ably catered for in the acts—to commence any action up to 28 January 2009. This would give time, one would hope, for the coronial process to be finished and for people to consider their position. This would bring people’s ability to make personal injury claims into line with non-personal injury claims, such as property claims. The time limit for non-personal injury claims, which includes property damage, would remain at six years under this amendment.

My bill does not seek to make any changes to the definition of personal injuries. They are already well defined by law. It seeks to amend the Limitation Act by inserting a proposed new section 16C. For members’ benefit, section 16 deals with compensation to relatives, which does not apply here. Section 16A deals with compensation claims for workers and would apply to anyone deemed to be a worker during the bushfires who suffered injuries. Section 16B would cover all other personal injuries and would cover all other persons who suffered injuries due to the bushfires.

Proposed new section 16C would, by virtue of subsection (1), extend the course of action under sections 16A and 16B from three years to six years. Subsection (2) states that in this section the stipulated period for the January 2003 bushfires and any relevant fires in the ACT as a result of that started on 18 January 2003 and ended on 28 January 2003. That is consistent with the definition in the Land (Planning and Environment) (Bushfire Emergency) Regulation 2003.

A six-year limitation period would expire on 29 January 2009 and subsection (3) of my bill indicates that section 16C would expire on 29 January 2009 and then be deleted from the act. Subsection (4) makes clear that the effect of section 16C would not be affected by the repeal of the law in January 2010. If someone took an action in 2008, within this time frame, and some other person came along in 2011 and said that there was no such law on the statute book, the action would still be valid because proposed section 16C would still have effect because of that action having been taken in the proper period stipulated. Subsections (3) and (4) are points that the drafters thought important to put in. Subsection (3) effectively is a sunset clause for this bill. The last section is a drafting style currently used by parliamentary counsel to deal with laws when there are sunset clauses, as there is in this one.

Put simply, this bill would extend to bushfire victims the ability to have up to six years to make claims for personal injuries and property damage, noting that they already do have property damage. It would enable them to take any action they wished to take as a result of any matters arising from the bushfire coronial inquest and it would ensure that their rights to take any necessary action were protected. It is a fair deal. There are no guarantees that lots of people will avail themselves of the opportunity to take such action, given that already a number have taken action within the present three-year limitation period, but the bill does give people some options, something that bushfire victims are keen to see happen.

This bill does not affect any other class of victims. It simply applies to bushfire victims. It is the result of the lengthy process for the coronial inquiry, which is not finished and we have no idea when it really will finish. The rapidly approaching expiry of the time limit for personal injury claims demands that we protect the rights of bushfire victims by passing this bill. I think that it is the very least the government can do to see that the rights of all citizens affected by the bushfires are adequately protected by our laws and that their rights are fully recognised. I commend my bill to the Assembly.

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

Civic Development Authority Bill 2005

Mr Seselja, pursuant to notice, presented the bill.

Title read by Clerk.

MR SESELJA (Molonglo) (10.44): I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

Mr Speaker, in the last few months, future plans for the development of City Hill and the city as a whole have been the subject of significant discussion. There has been discussion about the need for population growth and revitalisation of the city. Canberra has often been accused of being boring. There has been criticism that it lacks soul, that nothing happens on weekends or that after 5 pm everyone goes home to the suburbs. It has been a longstanding joke amongst people interstate that they should take a book when visiting Canberra so as to have something to do.

I do not believe Canberra is boring. The criticism about lack of a city centre does have some merit. Whilst there is a somewhat defined city centre, it is split down the middle by Northbourne Avenue and does not encourage travel from one side of Northbourne Avenue to the other. It is at times as though the eastern and western sides of the city are separate areas or even separate cities.

There is no doubt that there is a growing level of activity in Canberra night-life, of activity in Canberra after hours, through cafes and restaurants and the growing cafe culture of places such as Manuka, Kingston, Dickson and Lyneham. Canberra has a vibrant cultural life, but this is no doubt limited to some extent by the size of the city as well as its design.

Mr Speaker, the launch of the Griffin legacy by the National Capital Authority last year started a discussion about the future of our city centre, focusing initially on the documented plans that Burley Griffin created for the city on its foundation 80 years ago. The Griffin legacy spoke of the importance of City Hill, firstly as part of the national access and the parliamentary triangle. The original vision for City Hill was as a location for the city hall, a place from which the city would be governed, symbolically, at the high point of the city area and at a point where the avenues of Canberra were to meet. But City Hill has now become an island in the middle of the city, cut off by the traffic entering and exiting from north and south, and an empty place visited only sporadically by Canberrans.

Since the release of the Griffin legacy, we have seen three plans released for the future of City Hill: one produced by the ACT government, one by the living city team led by Terry Snow, and one by an international consortium. These ideas have led to a significant debate about what is the best outcome for the area. There appears to be broad agreement across a range of interests that the development of City Hill is an important part of the completion of Canberra. There is an acknowledgment of the need for Canberra to have an identifiable and attractive city centre.

This bill seeks to move the debate forward. This bill does not seek to advance one particular model for what should be constructed. The bill creates a framework through which this debate can be progressed and outcomes can be achieved and through which the ACT community at large can be involved in discussions and decisions about the future of their city.

The Civic Development Authority Bill proposes the formation of an independent authority tasked with the role of overseeing the development of a defined area of the Canberra CBD in the vicinity of City Hill, meeting Commonwealth Park and towards the lake foreshore. In the past, cities all over the world have used the model of an independent authority specifically set up to oversee the development of particular important areas. From the Rocks in Sydney to Southbank in Brisbane and Docklands in Melbourne, there is a long history in this country of this model being used.

The need for an independent authority is clear. Many of those involved in this sector on a daily basis have emphasised the need for a body to be created outside the current planning system, with a fresh approach and a focus on the City Hill area and the outcomes sought. I am aware of a number of voices on this issue that see that as a way

forward. I note that the property council was reported by the ABC recently as saying that an independent body was needed. Similarly, the executive director wrote in *City News* on 11 August 2005:

A renewal corporation set up as an independent statutory authority is best suited to the planning and design outcome for the redevelopment of Civic and City Hill.

She went on to write:

It can't be distracted by the ongoing responsibilities for planning and land administration elsewhere in the territory.

Likewise, the living city proponents have stated that they think the best way to drive this issue is through an independent authority. The *Canberra Times* reported on 29 April 2005 that the living city proponents had called for the establishment of a statutory authority, similar to those set up to manage the Kingston foreshore and Parliament House developments, to oversee the project.

The Civic Development Authority would be administered by a board containing representatives of the National Capital Authority and the ACT Planning and Land Authority and persons skilled in the areas of town planning, engineering, architecture, land development and transport planning. Crucially, in addition to the roles of the business community in Canberra, the bill also prescribes the involvement of members from the ACT community, with at least two members of the board prescribed as community representatives. That would provide an opportunity for the community's views to be provided not only in consultation on the development but also as part of the ongoing and long-term progress of what would be a 15 to 20-year project for our city. It would provide the opportunity for the community to have ongoing participation, something that sadly has been lacking from some other recent community consultations.

Mr Speaker, the bill also proposes that a master plan be developed to prescribe and control development within the area. The master plan would provide a strategic framework for development of the area. It would be crucial in ensuring that a cohesive vision for the revitalisation of the area would be able to become a reality. This master planning process is used in other legislative regimes, such as the Commonwealth Airports Act. In this case, the master plan would be incorporated into the territory plan for the designated area.

It is important that, in addition to any commercial or residential development within the Civic development area, community space and cultural facilities be provided. The development of the master plan, which would prescribe genuine community consultation, would assist in identifying and meeting the need for such facilities in this area.

The bill sets out two mandatory periods of public consultation as part of the master planning process: the first by way of consultation and input to the authority board at the time of development of the master plan and the second prior to the provision of the master plan to the minister so that the community can also provide its input on the finalised concept prior to notification. These elements of consultation should go a long

way to addressing the concerns of residents and providing them with a voice in the process.

Mr Speaker, one of the benefits of this legislation is that it would set up a body free from the impact of changes of government over the next 15 years and beyond, allowing it to focus on the job of developing what could become Canberra's answer to precincts such as Docklands in Melbourne or the Brisbane city revitalisation. The bill has a 15-year sunset clause. This does not mean that the job would necessarily be completed by then, but it does make it clear that the authority is not intended to exist forever.

The bill prescribes a review by the minister seven years after its inception, to provide the opportunity for the authority and the community to achieve outcomes in terms of facilities and construction and to allow the opportunity for assessment of the needs of Canberrans in seven years, after some of these proposals have become a reality. A second review would take place after 14 years. The focus of it would likely be whether the authority had completed its job or whether the 15-year sunset clause should be amended and its life extended.

The bill provides the authority with the ability to facilitate the development of, rather than develop, the City Hill area. The authority would ensure that the master plan is created and then implemented, but it would not act as the developer. It would steer rather than row. The legislation incorporates modern governance principles to ensure transparency of process. Importantly, the authority would be able to undertake the project at no cost to government, as the proponents of one plan have demonstrated through their economic modelling. The opportunity for private sector development and the increased return from land sales would provide the territory with the funds to construct community facilities, with the revenue to construct buildings such as a new Legislative Assembly and with the funds potentially to construct a new convention centre.

One of the exciting aspects of this authority is that I believe it would have the opportunity to attract some of the best and brightest from Australia and overseas to be part of an exciting project in a way that existing government agencies cannot. I envisage that this authority would attract leaders, at the very least, in the fields of town planning and architecture, amongst others. The bill also strikes a balance between the independence of the authority and the need for community and Assembly involvement. The authority would, through this legislation, be provided with the framework and the ability to get the job done, to ensure that the City Hill development is more than a pipedream. It would provide sufficient independence to ensure that changes of government do not mean major changes in direction, and it would attract the best and brightest and provide the kind of focus that is needed for this kind of project to be a success. I commend the bill to the Assembly.

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

Legislation Amendment Bill 2005

Dr Foskey, pursuant to notice, presented the bill and its explanatory statement.

Title read by Clerk.

DR FOSKEY (Molonglo) (10.54): I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

I am pleased to introduce the Legislation Amendment Bill 2005, which I will henceforth refer to as the consultation bill. This consultation bill has arisen out of ongoing concerns of the Greens and a number of community organisations about the manner in which legislation is being developed for the ACT Legislative Assembly. There is a perception, wrong or otherwise, that government and other members are not including a thorough consultation process in the development of legislation and are missing out on valuable expert advice and important community opinion. Thus, the outcome of the legislation can be inherently flawed and often fails to provide the optimum solution to the policy problems that it seeks to solve.

The Greens have found in their consultations with community sector organisations that often they have not been consulted, apart from through our office. Many of their suggestions have led to improvements in the legislation. For instance, we believe that the Residential Tenancies Act was improved as a result of suggestions from relevant community organisations. Just this week, we have found that the tree protection legislation has come to the Assembly without many people who have an interest in it knowing that it was due to come up.

Mr Stanhope: That is absolute nonsense.

DR FOSKEY: We have found that many natural scientists are concerned that they did not know the bill was coming before the Assembly and would have liked the opportunity to comment on it.

Mr Mulcahy: Is the bill nonsense or the consultation?

Mr Stanhope: That comment is absolute nonsense. It is false.

DR FOSKEY: I am reporting on my consultations, Mr Stanhope. I am sorry; I am just reporting what I know.

MR SPEAKER: Order, please!

DR FOSKEY: In addition, the scrutiny of bills, which is formally conducted by an Assembly committee, but also to an extent by interested organisations and community members, is often a difficult and complicated process. Hence, an explanatory statement is expected to be tabled with the bill and is included on the legislation register, where it provides some insight to the public for the rationale behind the legislation and, more formally, some guidance on the legal interpretation of the act being passed.

The statement should explain in clear, simple terms the purpose and operation of the legislation. Whilst some explanatory statements are well done and greatly assist the process of understanding and scrutinising a bill, others are not. In response to these ongoing problems, I have presented the consultation bill, which aims to provide a partial solution.

Firstly, it proposes that an explanatory statement must accompany all bills, something, I must admit, that the government does, as is expected, that the Greens often do and that the opposition does less often. For instance, Mr Seselja's bill today, which was relatively long and complex, was unaccompanied by an explanatory statement and will require resort to *Hansard* by interested members and community organisations.

While it is possible to find some guidance to the legislative intentions in the tabling speech for a bill, the Greens take the view that, if we are asking the government and other members to lift their game, the same rules should apply to everyone, even though that would mean providing 65 copies to the chamber support section prior to tabling.

The heart of the changes I am proposing can be found in clause 4 of the bill. This clause proposes to insert a new chapter 5A, redefining the explanatory statement and its purpose. If the Assembly passes the consultation bill, explanatory statements will be required to include a report on consultation undertaken in the development of a bill. They will list community groups, individuals and government agencies and departments with whom the bill has been discussed.

Such a move would greatly assist the work involved in scrutinising a bill, as it would encourage policy makers to invite people or groups that have expert knowledge or are affected by a proposed instrument to have input prior to the finalisation of a bill. It would provide scrutineers with improved information about the community's inclusion in the bill's development and assist members and political and community groups in determining who else needs to be notified about a bill's presentation to the Assembly.

At the scrutiny of bills conference in March, which some members of this Assembly attended, one of the key speakers, Professor Steven Bottomley, noted:

We need to move away from what Edward Page, a UK political scientist, has called they world of secluded politics. There are two risks that need to be avoided here. One is where there has been no consultation at all where there should have been and the other is where there has been consultation but it has been targeted to known sectional interests, leaving other points of view out of the process—what the Administrative Review Council has called captured consultation.

The professor suggests:

... where an explanatory statement says that consultation has been carried out it specifies who is consulted; who was not consulted and why they were not consulted; how the consultation occurred, whether it was done by letters, notices in newspapers, face-to-face meetings and so forth; and what opinions were expressed by those who were consulted and whether those opinions were factored into the final instrument and in what way, and if not, why not. Alternatively, if no consultation has occurred ... that in itself needs to be addressed and explained clearly in the explanatory statements.

Mr Speaker, I believe that a similar consultation report is required for cabinet submissions at a state and federal level but is not provided to the public. I have no idea if these consultation reports satisfy Professor Bottomley's criteria, since I am not privy to their contents. However, the ACT cabinet handbook does state that it is mandatory for all

cabinet submissions to report fully on the outcomes of external stakeholder consultations. The cabinet handbook states that consultation issues that should be reported on in a cabinet submission are: who is most affected by the policy proposal? What methods have been used to engage these people and over what time period? Have key stakeholders and representative groups been consulted? How has the broader community been made aware of the policy proposal, if appropriate? In addition, submissions should report on the issues raised during consultation and provide responses to those issues. These sound very similar to Professor Bottomley's proposal.

Making such information available to the public would greatly assist the third person's ability to scrutinise a bill and assess how it was developed. It would also help members in their own consultation with constituents on the bill. I am interested to know if members of the Assembly are ready or willing to take this large step and I look forward to debate on this consultation bill.

My hope is that, once this bill has been passed and put into practice, policy makers will improve their consultation practice and reporting and their comfort with making this reporting available, working towards the stronger measures put forward by Professor Bottomley and, apparently, practised by cabinet. You will see that in the explanatory statement attached to the consultation bill the ACT Greens have included a list of the organisations and individuals we have consulted in developing the bill.

A brief summary of the responses so far has shown support from community agencies, more enthusiasm for consultation reporting than for the mandatory explanatory statement from the opposition, and more enthusiasm for the mandatory explanatory statement than for a consultation report from government.

We will continue to do this with our bills whether or not this bill is successful. I do believe that in the interests of accountability and transparency we should all be doing it. Mr Speaker, this bill is a small step on the path to accountability and transparency and I commend it to the Assembly.

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

Proposed motion on industrial relations laws

Mrs Dunne: I take a point of order, Mr Speaker. I seek guidance as to whether the motion to be proposed by Mr Gentleman is in order in a couple of respects. One is that it relates to non-existent federal industrial relation laws; they have not yet been tabled. The other is that much of what it refers to has to do with the protection of family friendly working conditions and I am particularly interested in that as it relates to the select committee which has been established to look at working families in the Australian Capital Territory. That committee, as we know, has been formed. I understand that there have been advertisements for submissions. I am wondering whether there is some crossover between this debate and the inquiry of the select committee.

Mr Corbell: Mr Speaker, I wish to speak to the point of order. First of all, this motion in no way duplicates the terms of reference of the select committee that has been established. The terms of reference of the select committee are quite different. Whilst the

motion is about a related subject matter, it does not purport to pre-empt or in any way presuppose the outcome of that committee investigation.

Further, Mr Speaker, it is worth noting that a substantial part of this motion also deals with issues that are current in the federal parliament at the moment, are matters of public debate, as you would know, and are reasonable to debate in this place. I do not believe that there is any pre-emption in terms of the matter referred to the select committee.

MR SPEAKER: May I just make a few observations. There may be some confusion about debate on these issues and standing order 117 (e) (ii), which relates to questions. It makes clear that questions in the Assembly cannot refer to proceedings in committee not reported to the Assembly. That standing order cannot be applied to general debate in the Assembly. It is not the intention of the standing orders, in my view, to stifle debate about particular matters because a committee is hearing a matter. For example, when the estimates committee is considering the budget, there is still much debate about budgetary issues. The consideration of health matters by the health committee does not shut down debate in this place about matters related to health.

I have just had a look at the motion and the issue of whether or not the federal government has introduced the legislation is not particularly relevant. I think, Mrs Dunne, that the member is entitled to introduced this sort of motion, but you have to be careful in the scheme of things that you are not trying to prod the committee to form a particular view about a particular matter under its consideration in the course of debate, that is, that you are not directing the committee to do certain things or attempting to direct the committee to do certain things. I think that the motion is in order.

Industrial relations

MR GENTLEMAN (Brindabella) (11.08): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) the Federal Government's intention to introduce new industrial relations laws as soon as October 2005 into the Federal Parliament;
- (b) the complete failure of the Federal Government to consult with State and Territory Governments over the content of the proposed laws;
- (c) that the proposed laws once passed will have immediate impact on working people in the ACT; and
- (d) the considerable community concern over the impact of proposed laws particularly in relation to the:
 - (i) protection of family friendly working conditions;
 - (ii) protection from unfair dismissals;
 - (iii) protection of penalty rates, public holidays and leave entitlements; and

- (iv) negative impact of secret individual contracts; and
- (2) calls on the Federal Government to consult immediately with the ACT Government on the proposed changes to industrial relations laws in order to ensure the protection of existing employment conditions for ACT workers.

On 16 August I raised with this Assembly the disgraceful attempt by the federal government to limit the rights of owner-drivers through its proposed independent contractors act. The right to representation, to collectively bargain and the right to fight unfair contracts and dismissals will be stripped away, forcing colleagues to compete in the race to the bottom. Those were my statements. There are those on the hill who are not content in scrapping the rights of owner-drivers across the nation. These bullies are determined to extend the culling of rights and entitlements to all working people. This motion seeks to bring to the attention of this Assembly the extent of damage the federal government hopes to inflict on workers in the ACT.

The new industrial relations laws could be upon us as soon as October this year. Rights like four weeks annual leave and the personal leave that were fought for by our parents, and theirs, could be negotiated away for a price, but at what price the federal government is unclear. So too is their confused definition of the term "negotiation". Can genuine negotiations take place in an environment where workers can be sacked without any reason or recourse? I think not. I am not alone in my concern over these changes and their potential impact.

On 5 August 2005 state and territory industrial relations ministers met with the federal Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations, Mr Kevin Andrews. At this meeting the state and territory ministers sought from Minister Andrews a commitment that no ACT worker would be worse off under his government's proposed industrial relations laws. An assurance was sought that no secret individual contract would offer less take-home pay than that available under the relevant award. Further sought was a commitment that fair minimum standards would be set by a truly independent umpire. The response from the federal government's IR lackey was that no guarantee would be given that ACT workers would not be worse off under their proposed industrial relations changes.

There is no guarantee that the take-home pay of ACT workers will not be reduced as a result of proposed IR changes. There is no guarantee that ACT workers will not have to supplement their pay through trading-off annual leave. There is no guarantee that young workers in our community will not be forced into working environments where they are too scared of dismissal to raise safety issues or request a pay increase. It would be wrong of me to state that the federal government has not consulted on these changes. Further, it would be wrong of me to state that the government even drafted these changes. The parallels between the policies of the Business Council of Australia and the proposed changes are astonishing, written by the same hands possibly; at very least the proverbial doors being left open.

This open door policy applies only to those organisations that annually grease the pockets of the Liberal Party. However, the ACT government, voted in to represent the working people in our society, have had the door closed in their faces. The federal

government has failed to consult with the ACT government, as well as with the other state and territory governments, on these proposed laws. Why? Perhaps they feel that this lack of consultation with state and territory ministers, and with the community, is consistent with negotiations under the proposed changes.

It is shameful that the federal government has sought to ignore the feedback of the ACT government. It is disgraceful that they ignore the comments and concerns of ACT workers. Sixty per cent of those polled by AC Nielsen in July this year were opposed to the federal government's proposed industrial relations changes, with a further 19 per cent unsure. Working people are concerned that the results of over 100 years of worker struggle will be lost forever and, in its place, a system that pits worker against worker, scraps unfair dismissal protection and forces workers into contracts with reduced leave entitlements and penalty rates. Twenty-one per cent is not a mandate.

I bring to this Assembly's attention a number of recent media reports about what to expect under the future buy and sell system of negotiations. On 16 August it was reported that the Office of the Employment Advocate was endorsing individual contracts for customer relations workers who reduce sick leave to just five days per annum, and cancelled out any form of paid bereavement leave. When questioned by ABC radio over the drastic halving of personal leave entitlements, Minister Andrews stated that workers had decided to trade these entitlements for increased wages. He believes that families "want flexibility in relation to some of these things". Flexibility was again the theme driving creative means of wages payment endorsed by the Office of the Employment Advocate. The OEA website pays tribute to an Australian workplace agreement that supplements salary with "an allowance of one free video rental per week to the value of \$6"—not even a DVD.

It was in 1900 that the workers in this country fought for the right to be paid in money. Times are a changin' when what once was rum is now the latest in romantic comedy. Joan's story is another example of the flexibility we apparently strive for. Joan had worked as a cook for nearly 10 years, from early morning to lunchtime Wednesday to Saturday. Joan's employer handed her an individual contract to look at overnight and told her that, if she refused to sign it, she could look for another job. The contract provided no sick leave or annual leave, no public holiday penalties, and she would have to be available, on call, seven days a week until 10 pm. For refusing to sign, she was dismissed. Clearly these contracts are forced onto workers whose only choice is between a boss's contract and unemployment.

Under current legislation Joan has the right to pursue an unfair dismissal claim through the Australian Industrial Relations Commission. She also has the right to ask that her union represent her on matters relating to her claim. With the introduction of the proposed industrial relations laws the federal government will be legislating to exempt businesses that employ up to 100 employees from unfair dismissal laws. The federal government claims that there is protection for workers who are terminated on grounds such as race, colour, sex, union membership, pregnancy and so on. Are the instigators of such widespread change so naive as to believe that an employer will single out a reason for termination? I think not. This is clearly another example of the federal government's vision of flexibility.

Under the proposed industrial relations reforms standard work weeks are up for negotiation. It is the Howard interpretation of the word. It was in 1948 that the 40-hour work week was gained, striking a balance between work and family. From 1981 to the present day we have enjoyed a standard work week of 38 hours. Gone is the government endorsed right to eight hours work, eight hours recreation and eight hours rest. Gone is the right to be fairly compensated for working away from your family on weekends. Gone is the right to annual leave to spend with your children.

Under these individual contracts our most vulnerable—young people and workers in low skill jobs—are being exploited. I do not mind a donut, but I will think twice before consuming another of Krispy Kreme's donuts. It was recently reported that, while the Penrith Panthers were on their way to victory in the 2003 NRL grand final, Jasmin Smith was on her way to working a 16½ hour day in the Krispy Kreme Penrith outlet, without any overtime payment. Overtime rates were lost under the contract presented to Ms Smith in early 2003, a contract that also eliminated Saturday loading, uniform allowance and cut her base hourly rate. She was exploited because she was young.

It is not only young people in our society that face exploitation under AWAs. Figures from the ABS show that only some seven per cent of AWAs registered to date have provision for maternity leave and that women on AWAs earn an average of \$5.10 an hour less than men. Is this really the future that we want in the ACT?

I am not alone in my limited confidence that the federal government's changes will not decrease workers' rights and entitlements. Minister Andrews's own staff members here in the ACT in the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations are not convinced that the government can be trusted to act fairly towards its own employees. In the latest round of negotiations, DEWR has sought to scrap workers' rights to take an unresolved dispute to the Australian Industrial Relations Commission. Rather, staff could take their dispute to an independent arbitrator appointed by the department.

Staff are rightly concerned that the department intends to establish a kangaroo court where very little is resolved. Staff members are not convinced that they would be better off negotiating away their rights to fair dispute procedures. The federal government recognises that the Australian people do not support their industrial relations changes; however, this has not led to a changing of position. Rather, it has led to the federal government embarking upon a \$20 million advertising campaign to convince working people that changes to industrial relations legislation will equate to a stronger economy. The campaign falls silent on the issue of better working conditions for workers.

Is a stronger economy the real motivation behind these proposed changes? The Prime Minister's hatred for and loathing of the union movement spans his political career. The waterfront dispute, the Cole Royal Commission into the building industry and now the overhaul of the industrial relations laws are all notches on John Howard's belt of individualism. Let us not be fooled that the direction of the economy, and the economy alone, is the motivation for this government. It is important in any debate about these proposed changes to explore the concept that these changes will strengthen our community. On 11 July this year Prime Minister Howard addressed the Sydney Institute on workplace relations reforms. He said we needed to be more productive. He continued:

In a global economy that increasingly values specialisation and flexibility, perseverance with workplace reform is essential if we are to narrow this productivity gap further and respond to challenges such as the rise of China and India as great economic powers.

As the PM himself later acknowledges in his address, Australian workers are by far more productive than Chinese workers. But then the federal government's real desire is not for increased productivity but rather to drive down real incomes in this country. He says, "It is true that, on average, a worker in Chinese manufacturing cost only \$730 annually between 1995 and 1999." To further complement this belief that it is about wages, the industry minister, Ian Macfarlane, late last month told Sydney radio, "We've got to ensure that industrial relations reform continues so that we have the labour prices of New Zealand."

There is evidence across the Pacific to suggest that these proposed changes will reduce real incomes. A New Zealand study found that, in the 17 years since the implementation of laws similar to those proposed by the federal government, New Zealand is experiencing higher unemployment and lower real wage incomes. Anecdotal evidence suggests that, within 18 months of the reforms being introduced, many New Zealand workers lost penalty rates and had their take-home pay reduced. Faced with such dire possibilities, it is little wonder that the working people of Australia seek guarantees from the federal government. It is little wonder why the government refuses to give them.

If the Howard government were sincere in its determination to increase productivity and specialisation, the focus of their workplace reforms would be centred on reversing the drastic skills shortages faced not only by the ACT but also in all states around the country. In the ACT we face shortages in hospitality, in community services and in building and construction.

There is one positive to the federal government's proposed IR laws; that is that the government has accidentally encouraged the formation of a social justice movement that extends beyond the unions. Churches of all denominations have come out against the proposed changes, primarily for fear that the rights of families will be forsaken in the name of flexibility. Not surprisingly, this line has been taken by new Senator for Victoria, Mr Steve Fielding, of the Family First Party. He used his maiden speech to attack the federal government's proposed changes.

Through the national advertising campaign that is presented by the federal government and the ACT trade unions, unions like the Transport Workers Union are spreading the message that the federal government's planned IR changes will see the disintegration of rights and entitlements to work. But what of the opposition members in the ACT? There is nothing but unbridled passion for stripping away the rights and entitlements of working families in the ACT.

In the chamber yesterday we heard Mr Mulcahy saying how outlandish it was for the ACTU to make a claim for an increase in the minimum wage. The best example of this is the opposition's position on the industrial manslaughter legislation that was introduced in the Assembly last year. Not only did the ACT Liberals vote against this in the chamber but they also made an election promise to repeal the legislation if they were elected. As

you can see, the ACT working people agreed with the introduction of legislation not only by voting the ACT Labor Party back into power but also as a majority government for the first time in the history of self-government.

We in government have to care for the consequences. We have been elected to represent the people of the Australian Capital Territory, minimum wage earners included, Mr Mulcahy. I move that this Assembly calls on the federal government to remember its role as representative of the needs and wants of all workers and, in doing so, consult immediately with the ACT government on the proposed changes to industrial relations laws in order to ensure the protection of existing employment conditions for ACT workers.

MR MULCAHY (Molonglo) (11.22): That was a most extraordinary dissertation from Mr Gentleman in relation to the industrial relations regime but not one that either accords with my research or with the facts as they are known to me. Let me talk, first of all, about consultation with state and territory governments. As has been determined, in fact, Minister Andrews recently wrote to the ACT government—to Mr Hargreaves, I believe, when he was acting IR minister. He told him that the government remains “open to input on its reform plan, from state and territory governments”.

At the last workplace relations ministerial council meeting the minister indeed agreed with state and territory ministers to continue consultations on its proposed new framework. Indeed, state and territory governments have an open invitation to contribute to this process. States and territories have been invited to refer their powers to enable them to have the benefits of a single IR system, as the ACT, NT and Victoria currently do. Consultation does continue. I have undertaken consultation—that will surprise members opposite—with the labour movement, which I continue to do on a regular basis. I would urge them to enter into dialogue, rather than take an entrenched position of opposition to much-needed reform, indeed reform which has been dismissed rather frivolously here this morning but which only this last week was urged on Australia by the International Monetary Fund as an essential step forward in improving our economic base.

Claims have been made that terms and conditions are to go out the door. That is not the case. The government is not eliminating or outlawing any terms and conditions that currently exist within the federal system. Even matters which will no longer be in awards can continue to exist in agreements. That will include penalty rates, long service leave and so forth. Employers and employees who wish to keep their current terms and conditions will be able to do so. Workers currently on awards can transfer those terms and conditions into agreements, which will now be able to run for up to five years instead of the current maximum of three years. It will provide longer-term security and certainty for the work force in our community. Employees will be able to keep their conditions until they agree to new arrangements with their employer.

There are also guaranteed protections coming under the new arrangements to be introduced federally. In contrast to recent union scaremongering—and I must commend them on the advertising, it is very effective; as I said to some of your colleagues recently, it is a pity it does not let the truth interfere with the reports—lunch breaks, public holidays and a minimum of four weeks annual leave will continue to be protected in the new legislation.

In contrast to other misleading union claims, unions will still have the right to negotiate collective agreements. Union right of entry to workplaces will continue to exist; the industrial relations commission will continue to play a role in the resolution of industrial disputes in the determination of awards; and we will see simpler minimum standards. For the first time ever under the federal system, a common set of minimum terms and conditions will apply to all employees. Unlike the current system, which consists of thousands of different awards, all of which must be updated to reflect any safety net wage rise—a process which takes months and sometimes years—a single minimum wage system will cover all employees.

If anyone has worked in an industrial relations environment—and several of us in this chamber have—you would know the incapacity of ordinary employees and employers to fathom their way through the myriad rules that make up the award system. It is not a system with any modernity in it, it is not a system which people can cope well with. The improvements and the simplification of the industrial system will be welcomed by employees and employers alike and will lead to an improvement in our economic performance.

The other thing is simplicity and accessibility. In contrast to the old system, which was characterised by awards of several hundred pages, it will be possible to enter into rather straightforward agreements that do not require expert advice to understand. I know that is bad news for employer associations and employee organisations that have not really done their homework. But for those that are effective and efficient and look after their own members, there will be a future, as there will be for unions that take the task seriously. We will see simplification. This will make it easier to ensure compliance, enforcement and understanding by all parties concerned.

The awards will also be further simplified from the current 20 allowable matters to 16. The four matters being removed are already protected in other legislation, such as long service leave, superannuation, jury service and notice of termination. Conditions contained in current awards can also be included in agreements. As for the barb that this is at the behest of the Business Council of Australia, the Business Council of Australia had far more radical proposals on the table. I have certainly never benefited from their financial largesse, and I am very doubtful that anyone in the Liberal Party has.

The fact is that the business council are a lobby group with their own economic agenda. They write to me, and possibly other members, regularly. Their views were considered along with all the others. I would urge my colleagues opposite, instead of ignoring the system and standing outside the tent, to get involved in the process and make contributions to the minister, who is more than happy to listen to constructive suggestions. He invited Mr Hargreaves, when he was wearing the industrial relations hat, to take that up. If he had had the capacity to make that decision himself, he probably would have been able to do it.

AWAs have been subject to a great amount of debate. The secret individual contracts that the ALP disparage—and I use their term—have, in fact, been of huge benefit to workers. Workers on AWAs currently earn, on average, 13 per cent more than those on collective agreements and 100 per cent more than those on awards, the ALP's preferred alternative. Almost 750,000 AWAs have been entered into since 1997. This probably

reduces the role of some union officials because people have an arrangement that they are happy with and they do not have the secret knowledge of awards that is lost on the average worker or employer. But, in fact, we are seeing 13 per cent more earned by people on those arrangements. This is a great achievement. It is something that has benefited many households in Australia, which is why our country is at the level of prosperity that it is today.

Of course, the ALP's policy would abolish AWAs and force workers back into the anachronistic award system. It would reduce the take-home pay of thousands of workers. It is an ironclad guarantee that the ALP's policy would, in effect, cut the wages of workers currently on AWAs. It is an approach none of us can entertain, which certainly has no relevance in this era. Employees cannot be forced onto agreements. That is something that needs to be said on the record. In fact, it will continue to be unlawful to force employees into new agreements. If a worker does not like what is on offer, they can opt to stay on their current arrangements. A strong inspection service will exist to assist workers who believe they are not being paid their appropriate entitlements. So there is safety and assurance there that people will indeed have their rights protected, despite the mischievous and misleading campaign that the ACTU and, unfortunately, a few of my colleagues opposite have lent their support towards.

Let us look at some of the ALP's claims—ALP doom saying. Let us take a little trip down memory lane at some of their claims and predictions. Exactly the same predictions of doom and gloom that are currently being made by unions in the Labor Party were made by the same suspects in 1996 when the workplace system was last updated.

Mr Seselja: It has been terrible since then, hasn't it?

MR MULCAHY: Absolutely, Mr Seselja. Let us look at what happened. What did they predict? I will quote what the current shadow IR minister, Stephen Smith, claimed in 1995. He said:

The Howard model is quite simple. It is all about lower wages; it is about worse conditions; it is about a massive rise in industrial disputation; it is about the abolition of safety nets; and it is about pushing down or abolishing minimum standards.

He went on to say that:

As a worker, you have lots of doubts about these things you might have lost, but you can be absolutely sure of one thing: John Howard will reduce your living standards.

Then that other gentleman who is in the news at lot lately, Mr Beazley, in 1996 warned that:

The Workplace Relations and Other Legislation Amendment Bill strikes at the heart of the desire by all Australians for a fair as well as a productive society.

He went on to say:

If we pass this bill into law we will return the workplace to the battleground it used to be.

It sounds familiar, doesn't it? We heard it this morning. Mr Beazley went on to say:

It seeks to neuter the award system. It seeks to limit the rights and capacity of working people to act collectively to protect their living standards. It proposes an even higher level of punishment for working people, who, as a result of all this, have no avenue left for protest or protection but the right to withdraw their labour.

What actually happened, in contrast to these doomsday predictions of 1996, is that the reforms came in. What have they delivered? Over 1.7 million more Australians in work than you people could deliver when you had your turn. An increase in average real wages of over 14 per cent—and let us hear it—compared to 1.2 per cent in 13 years of Labor between 1983 and 1996. Which party is looking after the workers? We have the lowest unemployment in three decades—currently five per cent—and, of course, in Canberra it is three per cent. You cannot even find people to work here, there is such a wonderful level of employment. And the other area where we were told we were going to have tyranny and chaos under the Liberals was industrial disputes. We have the lowest level of industrial disputes since records were first kept in 1913.

The record speaks for itself. There was the history of all the trouble that was going to flow after those predictions were made by Stephen Smith and Kim Beazley but, like everything else they say is going to happen, there are different stories and outcomes because of good economic management. The Labor policy would, of course, return Australia to the dark days of a rigid one-size-fits-all industrial relations system. It would discourage enterprise bargaining and effectively abolish individual Australian workplace agreements.

The ALP's current industrial relations platform imposes on the party a policy that would not only roll back the reforms of the Howard government since 1996 but would, in fact, also undo the enterprise bargaining forms implemented by the Keating government in 1993. I had many a meeting with Laurie Brereton, who was urging me on. He said, "Richard, get more of those agreements in your industry. Come on; move off this old award system!" But apparently that is no longer in vogue. Paul Keating's former economics adviser, John Edwards, described this platform as one that had the potential to "reverse Labor's own reforms of 1992 to 1994 and to reintroduce the worst aspects of the old award system".

This came from an economic adviser to one of the Labor heroes. Access Economics, the ALP's preferred economic consultants—although they are also mine, I have to admit—concluded that, "Such policies are unlikely to deliver one of the four goals espoused by the ALP—high growth, high incomes, low unemployment, and a fairer Australia. The ALP workplace relations policy platform runs the risk of moving Australia further from these goals." These are economists that your organisation has used. Access Economics have warned about the hazards associated with the direction in which Labor is heading.

Kim Beazley's response to the need for further workplace reform has been to stick his head in the sand and deny that any further reform is necessary. He has had to do a lot of that lately—with his predecessor. I can understand, but I think that, on the industrial relations area, he needs to modernise his thinking. Indeed on 12 April Kim Beazley told the National Press Club that, "The industrial relations lemon has been squeezed dry."

That sounds a bit like Mr Quinlan, who likes to squeeze things dry too. In the industrial relations area he thinks we can go no further. Incidentally, that is not a view shared by the International Monetary Fund.

On 17 May he argued that, “Administrative arrangements in industrial relations can continue to be streamlined, but these changes simply are not going to provide a new wave of productivity growth. The major reforms in this field are now in place.” That is another of his predictions that will not be validated over time. Then on 15 June Mr Beazley went on to claim that:

We reformed the industrial relations system ... As far as we're concerned, the reforms that needed to be there in industrial relations, the enterprise reforms and the flexibility that came with all of that, that's been done.

He has this view that, once you are there, you do not reform any further. You do not advance things, you ignore the international competitive pressures this country is facing. Mr Gentleman made a sound point earlier about China and India. We need to look at the situation, the impact on our industries. We have a motor vehicle industry that has had \$4 billion sunk into it in recent years and is now under pressure. These things do affect and impact even on the IT industries in Canberra. If we cannot create a greater flexibility in the work force we will lose in the economic race. We have been guided sensibly by the Australian government on a range of these economic matters, and the industrial reforms will continue to deliver those wins.

Unfortunately, the Labor Party is hopelessly beholden to the trade union movement. Trade unions have donated over \$47 million to the ALP since 1995-96. At a time when union membership barely comprises 17 per cent of the private sector work force, unions now have more control over the Labor Party than ever before. It is sad that the arrangement with the trade unions is not, in fact, a matter of looking after those who they purport to take care of. We have seen that over the past nine years. We have seen the plight of ordinary Australians improve dramatically under a Liberal government, in contrast to the nominal growth that occurred in incomes during the unfortunate reign of the Labor Party, but we now see the unions preoccupied with their own survival. If I were an official, I would be worried too because an increasing number of young Australians are saying, “They're not about looking after our interests; what is important to us is our standard of living.” That is certainly what has been delivered by the Howard government. I think the reforms we are seeing will be proven to be very beneficial to the Australian economy.

MR CORBELL (Molonglo—Minister for Health and Minister for Planning, and Acting Minister for Children, Youth and Family Support, Acting Minister for Women and Acting Minister for Industrial Relations) (11.37): Mr Speaker, I rise to speak in support of the motion moved by Mr Gentleman today. There is no doubt that the proposed changes by the federal government in the industrial relations area are likely to have a negative impact on the ACT community. It is difficult to see how in this time of low inflation, low unemployment, booming corporate profits and huge surpluses that John Howard has somehow found an excuse to change a well-functioning industrial relations system.

Mr Gentleman's motion makes reference to the changes to unfair dismissal laws. These proposals will exempt 95 per cent of the ACT private sector work force from unfair dismissal laws. That means 100,000 workers—juniors, casuals, apprentices, shift workers and permanent workers—will no longer have access to a low cost, independent remedy should they be dismissed unlawfully.

The Howard government has used clever semantics on this issue. They claim that after their reforms, unlawful dismissal claims will still be possible. But unlawful and unfair dismissal are not the same. Unfair dismissal aims to achieve equality in the workplace and prevents employees being sacked harshly, unjustly or unreasonably. A successful unlawful dismissal claim, on the other hand, is possible only where there is a breach of a specific category prescribed in the act, and this is generally a termination of an employee based on discriminatory grounds or where an employer does not provide the relevant minimum period of notice of termination to an employee.

Further, unfair dismissal claims are generally heard in the affordable industrial relations commission. In comparison, unlawful dismissal claims are generally heard in the far more expensive Federal Court, in which an employee must hire a lawyer to have any chance of success. The cost-prohibitive nature of unlawful claims compared to unfair claims is demonstrated by the number of claims actually heard. Only 147 unlawful termination claims have been referred to the Federal Court since 1996—nationally less than 25 cases a year. Yet, over the same period the industrial relations commission has processed more than 50,000 unfair dismissal applications. Perhaps that is the real reason why the federal government wants to get rid of this option.

As the Senate inquiry into unfair dismissal and small business employment put it:

... removing access to unfair dismissal will inevitably result in an increase in the number of applications before the Federal Court and other common law courts by aggrieved employees seeking remedy for unlawful dismissal. There is no doubt that both federal and common law courts are significantly more time consuming and costly than other jurisdictions in which applications for unfair dismissal are currently being fought out. This is likely to have adverse consequences for both employers and employees.

Mr Gentleman's motion also makes reference to the negative impact on families that these changes will have. Mr Howard, as Prime Minister, suggests we are about to embark on a golden age, where flexible employers will grant enterprise workers their every wish under gold-laced AWAs. It is clearly his wish that these "secret contracts" replace enterprise agreements and awards as the norm in Australian workplaces.

But let us have a look at some of the research, some of the facts. Research already demonstrates that these agreements are anything but family friendly. Figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics show that only some seven per cent of AWAs registered to date have provision for maternity leave. Further, woman on AWAs earn on average \$5.10 an hour less than men. Research also suggests that "secret contracts" offer less flexibility for work/family balance and provide less job satisfaction.

The ACT government is fearful of the impact the increased use of AWAs will have here in the territory. ABS data suggests that the ACT has the highest percentage of female participation in the work force of any place in the country. Further, our percentage of women in the work force with children under four is 10 per cent above the national average.

These reforms clearly will have a significant impact in the ACT. It was therefore with great hope that the government welcomed the AIRC decision in the family test case, which the ACT helped argue. That decision means approximately 100,000 ACT private sector workers who have direct award coverage now enjoy real options for work/life/family balance. This was a great outcome for families in Canberra. But Mr Howard has already stated that the government will not guarantee this that decision will be protected in his coming reforms.

Given the semantics he and his ministers play on important issues like this, we have no doubt that is code for the federal government's intention to override this decision, resulting in families no longer having access to guaranteed consideration of maternity leave and parental leave. Mr Howard's decision to attack workers' rights will only lead to Australians working longer hours for less pay and less opportunities to spend time with their families. Mr Speaker, what an appalling outcome for our nation.

I would like to turn to the important issue of productivity and family life, and refer to one of the final effects these changes will have on the territory. Members of this government often stand up in this place and talk about workers' rights and entitlements, the difficulties faced by the more disadvantaged members of our community and the benefits of an ACT society which looks after its most vulnerable. As a result, those opposite accuse us of not being sufficiently focused on the economic arguments.

Mr Mulcahy, for example, suggests we should spend less time ensuring that the previously appalling pay of public servants, which was left to slip to such low levels during the Carnell-Humphries years, is addressed and we should spend more time forcing workers to achieve even greater productivity and performance. Of course, the difference between people such as Mr Mulcahy and members on this side of the house is that we recognise that fair working conditions, including ensuring workers are given sufficient work/life/family balance, and productivity are intrinsically linked.

That bible of economic rationalism and laissez faire economics, the *Australian Financial Review*, reported on 19 August that research shows there is a link between family harmony and productivity. Research conducted by IBM shows that divorce is having a direct impact on productivity, particularly for men. This productivity cost translates to about four hours less work per week for affected employees. These losses are in the form of more sick days and lack of concentration due to attitude problems. I say to Mr Mulcahy and those opposite—through you, Mr Speaker—that this means a business with 1,000 employees would incur an average cost of \$180,000 in leave expenses and over 11,000 hours of lost productivity each year due to relationship stress.

Mr Speaker, what does that have to do with these reforms? Let us look at what happened in New Zealand. When similar reforms to those proposed by the current federal government were introduced in New Zealand they had a disastrous effect on

productivity. David Peetz, Professor of Industrial Relations at Griffith University, examined the New Zealand economy from 1991 to 1996 when the country undertook a major reform of its employment landscape, including a strong push for individual contracts.

In the same period, the Australian Labor Party, through the then federal government, remained committed to collective enterprise bargaining. In comparing the two countries he found that during this period Australia had considerably higher productivity. The drop in New Zealand's productivity was due to employers switching from capital intensive methods of production to cheaper labour. This led to a growing skills shortage as employers lost the incentive to invest in what was a largely disposable work force. Today, New Zealand's Treasury working papers openly question the economic benefits of a deregulated labour market.

Peetz went on to compare Australia's productivity alone, for the period of collective bargaining introduced by Labor to the current productivity cycle, beginning in 1999, which had seen an increased use of the AWA. Again, he found that productivity dropped from a peak of 3.2 per cent per annum during enterprise bargaining to just 2.3 per annum now. This number, 2.3 per cent, is actually below the annual growth rate that existed during the award period of the early 1980s.

Mr Speaker, the facts speak for themselves. These changes will have a detrimental impact on the working conditions, lives and social context of the territory. For this reason, the government supports Mr Gentleman's motion.

DR FOSKEY (Molonglo) (11.48): Mr Speaker, I support Mr Gentleman's motion. According to Bradon Ellem, who is the Associate Professor of Work and Organisational Studies in the School of Business at the University of Sydney, the federal government's industrial relations policy, alluringly subtitled *A plan for a modern workplace*, constitutes the most significant legislative change since the passing of the original Conciliation and Arbitration Act 101 years ago.

The Greens, at local, regional and national levels, have been campaigning for fair industrial relations laws since the party's inception. At a national level, the Green's industrial relations policies recognise that:

The last two decades of "workplace reform" have seen the systematic reduction in the safety-net of workers' rights and entitlements, the weakening of the national system of arbitration and awards, and the deliberate weakening of the role of unions. These changes have gravely disadvantaged the most vulnerable and the least affluent workers, many of whom are women and young people.

The Australian Greens believe that it is necessary to redress the lack of balance between workers and employers. We believe that all human beings, irrespective of race, creed or sex, have the right to pursue their well-being in conditions of freedom and dignity, economic security and equal opportunity.

More importantly, the policy goes on to say:

The objectives of profitability and efficiency should not override social and ecological objectives.

I guess we can always get a little bit concerned when business is much more appreciative of policy changes about workers than workers are themselves. Mark Bethwaite of the group Australia Business Ltd has said:

Every leader who introduces courageous change is going to suffer a short-term reversal. In five years time, we will look back on the years prior to 2005 and wonder why we persevered with six different industrial relation systems which give rise to 4,200 award in 29,000 classifications. God looking down would not impose a system of that complexity and confusion on a country which is less than two per cent of global production.

That is the business word on our current industrial relations system, which I grant needs improvement but not the kind of change that has been proposed by the government.

The so-called industrial relations “reform agenda” will not contribute to the nation’s collective wellbeing. Instead, it will further concentrate this nation’s wealth in the hands of those already doing very well. In my opinion, these reforms are ideologically driven and are an attack on the human rights of Australians. The changes will hit hardest those least advantaged in our society—young people, women, those in low paid work, casuals and temporary workers.

Statistics show that since the initial breakdown of workers’ rights in the late 70s, those worst affected have been the young and those on low incomes. These members of our community have experienced a real decrease in their wages over the last 20 years, while the real wages or salaries for those on high incomes has increased exponentially. Statistics prove that the income inequality has increased and the trickle-down effect often advocated by neo-liberal economists is just not working. This is neither fair nor just.

Mr Speaker, I am going to particularly focus on the impact of the proposed changes on women, who for some time have been identified as one of the more vulnerable groups in our economy. Even despite advances in wages and conditions, on the whole most women’s jobs are still more lowly paid than many men’s equivalent jobs. The National Foundation of Australian Women has recently initiated the study with NATSEM on the impact of “welfare to work”—remember that these changes are also in the wind—combined with new industrial relations laws on women. The conjunction of those two very major reforms needs to be considered because that is where the most vulnerable people are.

Taken with the new “welfare to work” provisions, such as those that are pushing single mothers back into the workplace, we have a recipe for injustice. More than 60 women’s groups have warned that women will suffer more than men under the government’s workplace changes. The what-women-want project, involving 64 women’s groups boasting 3½ million supporters, says women’s income security and job stability will be eroded under the changes. Women are more likely to rely on minimum award wages and conditions and generally have less bargaining power in their workplaces than men. As a result, they will be disproportionately affected by the government’s plan to strip back awards and encourage more Australian workers to sign individual contracts based on one-on-one negotiations with their boss.

One-on-one negotiations require the person who is negotiating with the boss—who is, after all, the one with the power—to be articulate, well informed and self-confident. This is not the case for many women returning to work after raising a family or women from a non-English speaking background, who are not backed by a strong union. A representative of the group says that the relationship between the “welfare to work” changes and those proposed through industrial relations should be acknowledged.

The government plans to introduce a single national industrial relations system, change the way that minimum wages are set, and scrap unfair dismissal laws for some businesses. The new so-called unfair dismissal laws may have a much stronger impact on women because they are less likely to be able to take their appeals to the Federal Court. Single parents, the disabled and the long-term unemployed will also be forced into jobs as part of the “welfare to work” regime. We are not sure that those jobs are there, mind you. I do not hear the government talking about skilling up people. In fact, the removal of the JET program to encourage single or sole parents to undertake study so that they can become qualified as nurses has been cut under the “welfare to work” reforms.

Working mothers are more likely to be taking part-time or casual positions and they are also more likely to need the sick and family leave provisions that are going to be stripped away. That means that children and whole families will be disadvantaged by these changes. The Greens believe that workplace laws should be fair and protect all workers from unjust treatment, and that is not what these laws will do.

In closing, Mr Speaker, I want to commend the ACT government. The government has a role to play, too, in respect of employment in the public service and also in the community sector. I want to commend the government on its setting up of the community taskforce process, which is currently negotiating portability of long service leave and working towards a template agreement for reasonable wages across the sector. Wage indexation is on the agenda for next year. Of course, we all know that people in the community sector are paid much less for equivalent work than people in the public sector; so this is not before time.

Over the years, governments have tended to cost services on the basis of a minimum number of staff positions at a reasonably low wage for award levels, so this is an area of some concern. Nonetheless, while recognising that this is not just about the federal government, I fully support today’s motion about the proposed changes to the federal industrial relations laws.

MR STANHOPE (Ginninderra—Chief Minister, Attorney-General, Minister for the Environment and Minister for Arts, Heritage and Indigenous Affairs, and Acting Minister for Education and Training) (11.58): Mr Speaker, this is a particularly important motion for debate and discussion. I think, in fact, there is potentially almost no more important issue facing certainly workers and families in Australia than the federal government’s assault on workers. We need to look at the context and some of the implications of what it is that the federal government is seeking to do through its so-called industrial relations reform.

We have to accept and we have to acknowledge—and all Australian should acknowledge it—that what the federal government has set out to do very calmly and very deliberately

is dismantle the work of generations upon generations of good union members. That is what it is set on doing. That is the task. It is to undo the work of at least 100 years or more of hard work, of sacrifice, by good union members—Australian families, the backbone of the nation. It is all about eroding the basic rights of working Australians to a fair wage to a fair workplace and to their fair share of the wealth of Australia, which is a wealthy country. That is what it is that John Howard and the commonwealth government have set out to do. I think we need to acknowledge that it is the most significant threat that Australian workers have faced for decades. There is no more serious threat to Australian workers and Australian families than that which they now face.

Just two weeks ago I attended a lunch as guest of the Master Builders Association and the conversation over lunch was quite interesting. I think there are not many here who would not agree that the Master Builders Association and its members are not necessarily rusted on Labor supporters, or indeed the sort of audience that one would have expected to perhaps have had much sympathy for the position that the Labor Party and the Labor movement have put in relation to the so-called industrial relations reforms that John Howard and the federal Liberals are about to crash through the federal parliament.

The overwhelming sentiment at the meeting in a discussion around industrial relations was that there is no pressing need for industrial reform. That was the sentiment, that was the view expressed by developers engaged in the busiest period in construction and building and development in the ACT, certainly since the construction or the building of the new Parliament House. The overwhelming sentiment that was expressed was that they do not see such a need in their relationship with their work force. We are talking here about building sites, we are talking essentially about relationships with the CFMEU and other unions involved in the construction industry. They were saying to me that they see no need for these reforms. This is their experience in respect of their workplaces. I am talking here about building sites. I am talking about a meeting I had with builders and developers who expressed the view that they see no need for these reforms, that they see no need for the confrontation.

Mr Smyth : I will check with the MBA then.

MR STANHOPE: You should check this with the MBA. You should ask them what their experience is. You should ask them. This is an important discussion and an important point because it goes to the heart of the debate: why has the federal Liberal government set itself on this track, on this route? What is it that it seeks to achieve in an environment of record low employment? A three per cent trend unemployment in the ACT was delivered by Labor governments. It certainly was not delivered as a consequence of industrial unrest or an industrial relations system that was not working.

And this is the issue, this is the conundrum: you have the Liberal's sitting there laughing and scoffing about trend unemployment of around three per cent and in the same breath demanding the most drastic and draconian industrial relations reform that goes to the heart of the working conditions and the working life of workers and families—workers and families that have delivered record profits, that have delivered three per cent unemployment in trend terms in the ACT, and that are involved in the busiest period of activity in building and construction and economic development and growth in the history of the ACT. There is more building and construction under way at the moment in

the ACT than at any stage except a spike during the construction of the new Parliament House. This environment of nil industrial unrest, activation or dissention, with the lowest level of strikes or days away from the workplace imaginable, a period essentially of industrial peace unsurpassed, is, of course, being put at risk by these proposals.

What is the number one issue of concern? What is the issue that will potentially drive industrial unrest in Australia and lead to the very results that the people I had lunch with at the Master Builders Association do not want? They do not want confrontation, they do not want unrest, and they do not want and fear the consequences of this deliberate ideological assault on workers and families in Australia. And that is essentially the point that was made to me by the large employers. They do not want confrontation, they do not see the need for these reforms, and they do not really understand what it is about.

At the end of the day, they accept what we all accept—that this is pure ideology; that this is about punishing workers; that this is about eroding the power of unions; that this is about turning workplaces essentially into areas of competition, sporting arenas, where one worker is forced to compete against another worker for perhaps slightly more generous terms and conditions. But be under no misapprehension about this: this is about an ideological attack on unions. It is the last hurrah, the great hurrah, of a Prime Minister who for all of his political career has been bent on taking on the unions. I think he sees it as some great swan song on which he can sail out of the parliament and political life. But it will be his undoing.

One of the issues, of course, of continuing concern—just as it is in relation, for instance, to much of the legislation that is to be dropped on the table—is that there is no detail. The commonwealth, through both the Prime Minister and the Minister for Industrial Relations, has not been prepared to give any real indication of the content. We do not know that. In fact, I think we will be surprised if it is eventually dropped on the table in October. The Liberals have been stung by this and will continue to be stung by the reports which will come to pass of the legislating away of the right to holidays, the legislating away of provisions for sick leave, the legislating away of penalty rates, the legislating away of rights not to be forced to work on the weekend. These are the things that we will see and this is what has been expressed here today.

The other aspect of this, of course, is the impact that these changes will have, particularly on women, having regard to the casualisation of the work force and the particular vulnerability of women. I heard Mr Gentleman explain the treatment of paternity leave in the private sector through AWAs. One of the issues of great amusement to me is the beating of the breast by industry organisations and employer representatives in relation to the skills shortage and the lack of capacity to find people with appropriate skills. You only have to look at AWAs, particularly as they relate to issues like maternity leave.

I am sometimes staggered at the effrontery of industry representatives who would stand up and berate the skills shortage and the lack of people to fill positions, when you see the conditions they are offering. There is a rabid refusal to grant women, particularly in the private sector, anything approaching appropriately paid maternity leave. Seven per cent of all AWAs contain a provision for maternity leave equivalent to that offered by the public sector, and they whinge about a lack of skills, a lack of people to employ.

MR SMYTH (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (12.08): Mr Speaker, one should not miss the opportunity to rise and rebut the “sky is falling” philosophy of our leader here in the ACT. We have not seen this legislation and yet already it is bad; we have not got the written word but already it is condemned. It is condemned by those who belong to a regime that for 13 years saw the growth in real wages decline—it actually went down under the previous government. What we have seen in the last decade under the Howard government is in fact the greatest growth in real wages. The Chief Minister is leaving the chamber. He does not want to hear the truth, he does not want to hear the real story. Under the previous Labor government, of which the Chief Minister was a part, real wages grew by 1.2 per cent—1.2 per cent in 13 years. Under the Howard government, in the last nine years they have grown by over 14 per cent. So who is looking after the workers now? Who is making it better for workers and in fact who has created more jobs? In the last nine years there have been 1.7 million more jobs than there were in 1996.

Union membership—and here is the judgment of the work force, Mr Speaker—is the lowest that it has been for decades. It is the people who are rejecting the union movement and saying, “We have got a better deal and we are actually grateful for it.” So grateful were they for it, they voted Liberal at the last election and gave John Howard not just a majority in the House of Representatives but a majority in the Senate.

It is interesting to note that not only have we had real growth in wages but we have actually seen the gap in income levels between the rich and poor in Australia diminishing. The *Hansard* of the Parliament on 9 August 2005 shows the Prime Minister as saying:

... the mantra that the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer is wrong according to the Bureau of Statistics.

The figures that came out last Friday are a stunning repudiation of that mantra. They are also a very strong endorsement of the social justice approach which has underlaid the policies of this government for the last 9½ years.

What these figures disclose is that over the period 1995 to 2003-04, the average household income in Australia grew by 20.7 per cent in real terms.

Twenty per cent growth. Are we going to shun the reforms of 1996? I will not go back over the quotes that Mr Mulcahy read earlier but, according to the Labor Party, the world as we knew it was going to end. Well it did not and thank God it did not because Australian families in that time have had 20.7 per cent growth in real terms in average household income. We are proud of that and we should be proud of that. It puts the lie to what was said by the Labor Party in 1996. The Prime Minister went on to say:

What was really welcome about this finding was that the real incomes of low and middle income households increased by a proportionally greater amount—that is, 22 per cent—than the real incomes of the richest households, which increased by 19.3 per cent over the same period: low- and middle-income households up by 22 per cent; rich households up by 19 per cent.

He went on to say:

Under us, real wages have risen by 14 per cent; under Labor they rose by a miserable two per cent.

Under us, the minimum wage—

And here is the important thing; this is a social justice agenda that is actually delivering—not the cant and the rhetoric and the “sky is falling” sort of words that we hear from those opposite—

has risen by 12 per cent in real terms; under Hawke and Keating—

under the Labor Party—

it fell by five per cent in real terms.

That is how the union movement and the Labor Party protect the workers. Real wages went down. The record and the facts are there. We are the friends of the Australian worker. We are not engaged in rhetoric for Australian workers: we actually deliver outcomes for their benefit.

It is extraordinary that when the ABS brings these statistics out that just destroy the case of those opposite we are told that the things that are about to occur will bring the world to an end as we know it. It is sheer foolishness to be having a debate about something we know nothing about because we have not seen it yet. It is a case of, “But that is okay. We will keep putting out these fallacies and the rumours. The scaremongering will continue and we will try to justify our own existence, we will try to justify the existence of the union movement about a subject upon which we have not seen the detail.”

Mr Speaker, we have got a broad outline from the federal government and from the minister, Kevin Andrews. A document put out by the federal government rebutting the ACTU’s misleading claims states:

The reforms will:

- Retain federal minimum wages and conditions
- Retain a role for the AIRC
- Retain collective union and non union agreements
- Ensure a stronger inspection service.

So they are all staying. The document goes on to state:

The reforms will:

Not cut award wages—

people will not be on less money—

Not abolish awards—

the awards will still exist—

Not remove the right to join a union—

so how can this be an attack on the union movement?—

Not take away the right to strike

Not outlaw union agreements

Mr Stanhope said that this will dismantle the hard work, the 100 years of hard work, of union members and workers. Well it simply will not. It will build on that and it will improve, it will make better, the lot of the ordinary worker in Australia.

Those opposite have to tell us: what is wrong with 1.7 million more jobs in the last nine years; what is wrong with 14 per cent real growth in wages against 1.2 per cent under Labor over 13 years; what is wrong with the lowest unemployment in 30 years; and what is wrong with the lowest level of industrial disputation in decades? Nothing. What is wrong with making it better? What will happen if we rest on our laurels and say it is okay now? It might be okay now but the rest of the world is looking at us and they are trying to catch up and improve their own lot so that they can surpass us.

If we wish to retain the lifestyle that we currently have and indeed—gee, let's be audacious here—make it better, then we need to have a reform agenda. The real conservatives in this place sit on the government benches. The real conservatives are now members of unions. The real conservatives—those that do not want to improve the lot of the ordinary workingman and woman in this country—sit there opposite us and they do not have an answer to these facts. We will get more rhetoric, more cant, more useless words from Mr Gentleman when he gets up to respond.

Let us attack the notion that this measure is going to be anti-family and that it is going to attack women unfairly. It is interesting to note that 83 per cent of federally certified agreements—these are agreements that people negotiate—now contain at least one family-friendly provision such as carer's leave, part-time work, or time-off in lieu. Eighty-three per cent of people are negotiating on their own rights, on their own needs, about the things that are important to them and their conditions so that they can be better off. What is wrong with that? What is wrong with a worker negotiating so that he can be better off?

The reforms of 1993—and I give credit to the Keating government because they started some of this—built on and increased by the reforms of 1996, have played a large part in the prosperity enjoyed by employer and employee alike in the last decade. I will quote from a speech made by Andrew Robb. He said:

... the reforms to date, for many parts of our economy, go only part of the way to the model of industrial relations described by Paul Keating.

This is something that the former Labor Prime Minister, the man that Jon Stanhope used to work for, saw and wanted to continue. I think what we should have is a unified approach to this—an approach where Liberal Party, Labor Party, Greens and whoever else work together to improve the lot of the ordinary working man. We have gone a long way to doing that. There has been 14 per cent real growth in the last nine years. We have seen real growth, stronger growth, for low and middle-income households. We have seen real growth in the minimum wage under the current federal government as opposed to the negative growth that occurred under the former Labor government, and we want to build on that.

Should we be ashamed of wanting to make it better? No. Instead of saying the sky is falling in we should all be working together to make the situation better. The Chicken Littles among those opposite, who do not even know what is in this legislation, have already said it is going to be bad; that it is going to be bad because John Howard proposes it. Well, 1.7 million new jobs is not bad; 14 per cent real growth is not bad; the lowest levels of unemployment in 30 years is not bad; the lowest industrial disputation is not bad. I can make a good guess that the industrial legislation, when we see it, will not be bad, despite the nay sayers, despite the Chicken Littles, despite the “sky is falling” school of thought. This is a government that has got an agenda that will take Australia forward and keep it going forward, and that is something we all should be working to achieve.

MR GENTLEMAN (Brindabella) (12.18), in reply: I would like to thank members for participating in this debate. I am pleased to see that Mr Mulcahy has so much intimate knowledge of the proposed changes. Perhaps he could share the details with the minister, or the workers in the ACT, because we cannot get the federal minister to do so.

Let me give you the facts. The federal government has failed to consult the ACT government on proposed IR changes. The federal government refuses to give a guarantee that no ACT worker will be worse off under the proposed changes. The changes outlined under the flag of flexibility are really about reducing worker choice. Worker-friendly provisions like annual leave, provisional leave and standard working hours will be up for negotiation, if negotiation really exists in a hostile working environment.

Mr Mulcahy talked about how great the AWAs, or secret contracts, are and how better off we are for their individuality. Well they certainly are not great for Sydney mum, Melanie Reardon, who queried an individual contract that denied her the one weekend in three she spent with her children. Her employer, Harvey Norman Liverpool, told her that if she did not sign the contract they would be unable to keep her employed. More distressing for Melanie was her employer’s refusal to allow her time off when her brother unexpectedly passed away. Is this the type of workplace we want in our society, where a mother has to choose between time with her children and employment, where a sister is not allowed to grieve with her family? Well I am sickened that the federal government, instead of legislating to abolish such practices, is assisting employers to make Melanie’s situation the norm.

Melanie’s story is no longer unique. Recently the *Australian* newspaper reported on a story of an employer who is offering employees 24-hour contracts that are renewed daily. The same employer that ran the operation a year ago, reopened the New South

Wales abattoir. The same 100 employees that were made redundant last year were all taken back on casual contracts. One such contract was offered to Bernie Boxsell who had worked at the same abattoir for 17 years until he was laid off last year due to drought. If given a choice, Mr Boxsell stated that he would choose a permanent position with the entitlements that he enjoyed for 17 years over the new contract. Mr Boxsell said:

I liked the old way when you got a certain wage every week and you got your holidays. There was stability, but it's not like that anymore.

Mr Boxsell has no choice. Like most workers faced with Australian workplace agreements, the option is to take it or leave it—take a 24-hour contract that tomorrow may not even exist, or go without employment.

Family-friendly provisions, permanent employment—these are not the only things lost under flexible arrangements. ABS statistics state that under collective agreements, non-managerial staff earned on average \$24.10 per hour compared with \$23.10 under AWAs. There is a growing coalition of opposition to the federal government's legislation.

ABS statistics state that 21.3 per cent of Canberrans are union members, with anecdotal evidence that the union movement is experiencing growth. That is in direct contrast to Mr Mulcahy's statement of union membership at 17 per cent. Perhaps Mr Mulcahy should concentrate on his electorate here in the ACT. Efforts of individual unions, like the Transport Workers Union with their recent convoy to Capital Hill, are activating their membership in new and creative ways. They are putting forward their members' views, as they should.

Mr Speaker, I put it to you that either the union membership quoted by Mr Mulcahy or the real figure for the ACT of some 33,800 far outweighs the registered vote for Mr Mulcahy. The new proposed leader of the Liberal Party had some 6,583 votes and the next deputy, Vicki Dunne, had some 3,367—not even 10 per cent of the union vote. I urge Mr Mulcahy to consider this when advocating that there be no minimum wage rise, as he did yesterday, or supporting the removal of workers' conditions, as he did here today.

Mr Speaker, we in the Assembly have an obligation to working families in the ACT. This motion calls on the federal government to meet its obligation and consult with the ACT government about the proposed changes to ensure that no worker will be worse off. I urge members to support this motion.

Question put:

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

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 9

Noes 6

Mr Berry
Mr Corbell
Dr Foskey
Mr Gentleman
Mr Hargreaves

Ms MacDonald
Ms Porter
Mr Quinlan
Mr Stanhope

Mrs Burke
Mr Mulcahy
Mr Pratt
Mr Seselja
Mr Smyth

Mr Stefaniak

Question so resolved in the affirmative.

Motion agreed to.

Sitting suspended from 12.27 to 2.30 pm

Questions without notice

Canberra Hospital—psychiatric unit

MR SMYTH: My question is directed to the Minister for Health. In answer to a dixer yesterday about future mental health services, you told the Assembly that “the planning work we are undertaking” identifies 30 acute adult beds at the Canberra Hospital. Earlier this week I toured the refurbished psychiatric services unit at the Canberra Hospital. As you know, the psychiatric services unit has 30 acute-care adult beds. The staff there told me that they had been running at over 90 per cent occupancy for some time. The staff also told me that, if they had another 10 beds, they would be filled straight away.

Given the high occupancy rate at the psychiatric services unit and the staff’s belief that extra beds would be utilised, why, in your recent announcement on future mental health services, is there no consideration for extra acute adult beds?

MR CORBELL: The point that needs to be made is that the planning work that I outlined in the Assembly and in the press yesterday focuses on the planning for capacity for increased beds for children and young people and for forensic care patients. At the moment, the psychiatric services unit is meeting demand for all of those categories of client. They are meeting demand for children and young people right now. Right now we do not have a choice: they go into the psychiatric services unit. At the same time, from time to time forensic-type patients are potentially also accommodated in the psychiatric services unit.

It is quite clear that the government’s planning for additional capacity will free up pressure on the PSU, because specialised services will meet the needs, for example, of children and young people. That means that we are effectively creating additional bed capacity at the PSU. I would have thought that that was patently obvious to anyone who looked at the announcement yesterday.

MR SMYTH: Mr Speaker, I have a supplementary question. The staff told me that very few young people are admitted to the PSU. Will you table documents to support your claim that young people are admitted, and perhaps their numbers for the past 12 months?

MR CORBELL: I would always be very cautious about any assertion Mr Smyth made about what someone may or may not have said to him. I have every confidence in the capacity planning processes of ACT Health. I think the approach we have outlined is the one that will deliver the best possible services for the people of Canberra.

Disaster planning

MR PRATT: Mr Speaker, my question, through you, is to the minister for emergency services. I refer to the bomb scare incident on 7 September at Eclipse House. Why wasn't the manager of the Waldorf Hotel informed or notified that there was a potential bomb threat only metres from their building? Why did it take a member of staff of the Waldorf to go out and ask the police what was going on?

MR HARGREAVES: I thank Mr Pratt for the question. I have to say that I do not know the answer to his question at this point; neither do I know why, perhaps, the manager of the Holy Grail or the manager of the Canberra Centre was not told.

I have a lot of confidence in the way in which police officers deal with emergencies. With respect to the opposition's assertions yesterday that nobody in this Assembly knew, my information is that the police informed people here and that one of our attendants, quite appropriately, instructed evacuation of the east wing of this august body—to the extent where a couple of officers from the Chief Minister's Department—

Opposition members interjecting—

MR HARGREAVES: The people over there can rant and rave as much as they like; the fact is that they have been sprung. They were asserting yesterday, through innuendo, that nobody in this building knew; that there was nothing done about evacuating this building. That is what they were insinuating yesterday. There is no doubt about it. The truth, in fact, is out. The police had discussions with the proper authority in this building, which was a delegate of the Clerk, who is a delegate of your good self, Mr Speaker.

What happened? That officer went click, straight into the emergency evacuation procedures, took the advice of the police and arranged for the effective evacuation of this building. One member of this place was told directly by that staff member.

I can do nothing but applaud the actions of the police and applaud the actions of the attendant in this place who arranged that evacuation. When I hear these sorts of questions coming from the shadow minister for emergency services, following on the heels of such a manufactured and confected furphy yesterday, I intend to treat such questions with the contempt due to them.

Tree protection legislation

MRS DUNNE: My question is to the Minister for the Environment. This morning on ABC radio, an arboriculturalist, Mr Damien Smith, was speaking about the Tree Protection Bill, which is currently before the Assembly. In the course of the interview, Mr Smith claimed that arboriculturalists had not been consulted about the bill. Minister,

were arboriculturalists consulted during the drafting of the Tree Protection Bill 2005 or have they been consulted since its introduction?

MR STANHOPE: I thank the member for the question, which does allow me to correct the record, a record that has been significantly distorted today. I did not hear the interview, but I understand that a person, an arborist, did claim on the ABC this morning that he was not aware of the legislation. I find that passing strange. I have been advised today, in relation to the specifics of the question and the individual that you ask about, that the firm for which he works was directly contacted and was provided with a discussion paper, an exposure draft of the government's plans. Whether or not that particular person's employer chose to share the detail of the government's proposed new tree legislation with Mr Smith, the employee of that firm, of course is a matter for that particular firm.

My advice, as of today, is that the very firm for which the ABC's guest this morning worked was directly contacted and directly and deliberately provided with the information by Environment ACT, as, of course, were a whole raft of organisations across the ACT. The discussion paper and all of the fine detail of the new tree legislation were developed in close consultation with a range of experts across the board, and I have a consultation list as long as your arm.

The tree legislation has been in the making for years. The discussion paper and the details of the legislation have been on the net for months. The consultation period, of itself, was months long. This legislation has been consulted to death. The employer of the person who was the guest of the ABC this morning was directly contacted and invited to make comment on the proposal. I understand that employer chose not to.

MRS DUNNE: I have a supplementary question. Minister, could you provide by the adjournment today a complete list of all groups and individuals who have been consulted or who have commented to your government on the bill, and when they did so?

MR STANHOPE: I will provide what information I have available. Suffice it to say that consultation on this particular matter was extensive and exhaustive. Environment ACT deserves to be congratulated for the lengths to which it went to engage the people of Canberra on this piece of legislation.

It is a piece of legislation that grew out of the flawed and draconian legislation that the Liberal Party introduced in their last term in government. It was interesting yesterday during the debate to see the extent to which the Mulcahy faction trashed the legislation. They spoke about it in the most belittling terms, knowing full well, of course, that it was their leader who introduced the legislation that the bill we are now debating builds on.

We are taking out of it those draconian aspects, those aspects of Mr Smyth's interim tree bill that really horrified the people of Canberra and would have made it very difficult for them to manage their own houses and the amenity of their own blocks. It is Brendan Smyth legislation that we are reforming. We are ameliorating the worst aspects of the existing system, an interim scheme that simply covers the board.

Opposition members interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Order! Chief Minister, resume your seat. Members of the opposition will cease interjecting. Members of the government benches will also not participate in the affray.

MR STANHOPE: It does need to be stated for the record that the legislation that my government introduced has almost as its primary purpose to ameliorate the harsh, draconian, across-the-board aspects of Mr Smyth's legislation.

Mr Smyth: I raise a point of order. The Chief Minister misleads the house. The original legislation was amended by Kerrie Tucker and Simon Corbell. He must stop.

MR SPEAKER: Order! Withdraw the imputation.

Mr Smyth: I withdraw, Mr Speaker.

MR SPEAKER: Chief Minister, come to the subject matter of the question.

MR STANHOPE: I will. I will conclude on this point. There were many aspects of Mr Smyth's legislation that were admirable and which the Labor Party and this government support, in fact which we have retained and which form a significant part of the new scheme. I congratulate Mr Smyth for his initial support for tree protection in the territory.

What does confuse me is the fact that the Liberal Party have walked away from it. They oppose the new regime. They oppose a tree protection regime for the territory. They have walked away from Mr Smyth's commitment to trees, to the protection of exceptional trees within the territory, to the protection of our urban tree landscape. We commented on this in our caucus this morning. We commented on the extent to which Mr Smyth has been rolled on this.

It was interesting to reflect yesterday on those who rubbished this proposal in this place. They were Mrs Dunne, Mr Mulcahy and Mr Seselja, the faction in waiting, the dream team, the mob that are going to take over from "Brittle gum" Smyth. He does have a legacy in this area through his interim tree scheme. He did acknowledge the danger to some significant trees and the fact that some trees, when they bent or wilted or became fractured, when they represented a danger, might need to be removed as dangerous. Many of those are brittle gums.

The Liberal Party have acknowledged the danger of keeping Mr Smyth as leader of the Liberal Party and the Leader of the Opposition in this place. We consider that "brittle gum" Smyth will face the fate of many of those trees after which he is named.

MR SPEAKER: Order! It is inappropriate to refer to members by other than their proper title.

Mr Stefaniak: Also I raise a point of order under standing order 118 (a).

MR SPEAKER: I think the Chief Minister has concluded his remarks.

Vocational education and training

MS PORTER: Mr Speaker, my question is to the Acting Minister for Education and Training. There has been some media coverage about the time it has taken to respond to the commonwealth government's funding offer for vocational education and training. Could the minister bring the Assembly up to date on the state of negotiations on the funding agreement associated with the commonwealth's Skilling Australia's Workforce Act that was enacted late last month.

MR STANHOPE: I thank Ms Porter for the question. It is a very important matter. I think that members would be aware that there has been continuing correspondence between the ACT Minister for Education and Training and the commonwealth Minister for Education, Science and Training about the ACT's role in the national vocational education and training system. It was simply not possible for the ACT to accept the first offer put forward by the commonwealth. Through the setting of artificial targets in the previous VET funding agreement, the commonwealth would have been able to short-change the ACT of half a million dollars. My government was not going to allow this to happen and so we have been negotiating with the Australian government on reasonable targets and conditions of the grant.

We have responded quickly to all Australian government correspondence. The most recent letter from Minister Nelson arrived late, I think after business, by fax last Friday, 16 September. I responded to that letter this morning. So there have been no delays on our part. These negotiations have been very successful and the ACT is getting the best deal it can on Australian government VET funding. Minister Gallagher has struck a very good deal with the Australian government on funding of vocational education and training. The commonwealth funding will extend the ACT's capacity to carry on mainstream vocational education and training and to make a positive contribution to the national VET system.

The new funding agreement has stringent performance requirements and specified targets, such as increasing the number of apprentices in traditional trades and in other skills shortage areas. The ACT has already met, and will continue to meet, the requirements outlined in the Australian government's skilling Australia's workforce legislation and in the associated multilateral funding agreement. For example, the ACT has led the way in adopting a fully competitive approach with new apprenticeships through user choice, and for the last six years all apprenticeships and traineeships have been available through user choice. We have already met all the Australian government's requirements in this regard, before the agreement even starts.

Minister Katy Gallagher has also negotiated a realistic baseline for training activity targets, in hours of training and in new apprenticeship commencements. Minister Nelson agreed to modify his original requirements and ultimately he agreed that the baseline for training activity is, more appropriately, 2004 planned activity rather than the remarkably high levels of actual activity achieved in 2004. This means that the ACT will be able to meet its targets and avoid the very bizarre circumstance where the ACT could be penalised for alleged underperformance because it had done so well in 2004 and 2005.

We have augmented the training budget in 2004-05 by over \$3 million, an increase of about 25 per cent of user choice funds expended in that year. This increase in activity was in the core business area of traditional trades, as well as through broadening the scope of new apprenticeships in many more occupations. From 2003 to 2005 the ACT has increased the range of qualifications available through user choice by more than 25 per cent, as well as increasing the numbers of people taking up new apprenticeships by 50 per cent. The ACT is doing well with vocational education and training and will continue to do well into the future.

This is an example of the successful outcomes that can be achieved when the commonwealth elects to consult constructively with the ACT rather than seeking to impose conditions from the hill. The minister for education has worked hard to achieve a good deal for ACT in a spirit of positive consultation and negotiation with the federal government. I can only hope that Minister Nelson's colleagues might learn from the experience when considering policies relating to matters such as the new industrial relations laws, the number of houses at Pierces Creek and the number of members in this Assembly. Through good faith in negotiations we can achieve much in partnership with the federal government. However, this government's flexibility of course only goes so far. When the Howard government elects to act only on ideology, the result is poor outcomes for the ACT and the whole of Australia. Thankfully on this occasion, thanks to the hard work of the minister for education, Katy Gallagher, the ACT will enjoy more funding for our vocational education and training system on fair terms.

Planning—delays

MR SESELJA: Mr Speaker, my question is to the Minister for Planning. The *Canberra Times* of 16 September reported that architects and developers were choosing to work interstate or with the NCA to avoid the tortuous development application process in the ACT. A spokesman for the architects said that they were extraordinarily frustrated in their dealings with ACTPLA. He cited the example of Amaroo school, where ACTPLA said trees closer than 25 metres had to be removed but Environment ACT said they had to stay there, and that this had resulted in the approval process taking four to five times longer than it should. Minister, why did you assert that these claims are baseless, when clearly they are factual?

MR CORBELL: These sorts of claims have been made time and again for as long as I have been in the Assembly. It is an unfortunate element of the planning debate that the assertion is made that planning controls force businesses over the border. It is the same sort of claim you hear about industrial manslaughter: everyone is going to go over the border. It is the same sort of claim you hear for other industrial relations provisions: everyone is going to flee the city. Mr Speaker, just walk outside this building, count the number of tower cranes in the skyline of Canberra today and look at the level of development.

Mrs Dunne: Mr Speaker, I wish to raise a point of order. Under standing order 118, the minister cannot debate; he has to answer the question. We are not interested in how many tower cranes there are in Civic; the question being asked is about Amaroo school.

MR SPEAKER: It is about planning controls.

MR CORBELL: Mr Seselja asked me how could I argue that the claims are baseless, and he said that planning controls are forcing development over the border. I am making the point: walk outside this building today, look at the tower cranes, Mrs Dunne; look at the level of development.

Mrs Dunne: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. We can all count the tower cranes. The point is that there is nothing in Mr Seselja's question about people moving over the border. It was about the approval times at Amaroo school being four to five times longer and the fact that the—

MR SPEAKER: You might tell us what your point of order is.

Mrs Dunne: I am sorry, Mr Speaker. Mr Corbell has said that those claims are baseless. That is what the question is about. It is not about moving people over the border.

MR SPEAKER: Order! This is not a time for a speech, Mrs Dunne. As I heard Mr Seselja's question, it related to planning controls.

Mrs Dunne: No, it did not.

MR SPEAKER: I would like Mr Seselja to repeat the question. It was clearly about planning controls. That was my understanding. I could be proven wrong.

MR CORBELL: Mr Seselja's question is about how planning controls are having an impact on development activity, and where people choose to do their business. He cited Amaroo as an example, but there is a broader question. My response to Mr Seselja, as was my response in the paper the other day, is that you only have to go outside this place and look at the level of investment that is happening in this city right now. There is over half a billion dollars worth of construction activity currently happening in Civic, half a billion dollars worth of development activity currently happening in Civic. It is the single largest level of development in the city centre since self-government. Last time I looked, Civic is actually in the ACT; Civic is under the control of the ACT Planning and Land Authority for the most part. It is governed by ACT legislation, and development activity is occurring.

Opposition members interjecting—

MR CORBELL: But wait; there's more! Go down to Tuggeranong town centre, where there are massive levels of development either happening right now or in the pipeline. Go to Woden. There is major refurbishment of tower buildings in Woden and there are new buildings going up in Woden. There are significant multimillion-dollar developments occurring there. This is not an environment where people are fleeing the territory because they cannot do development in this town. Yes, our planning system needs to improve. The government has embarked on a process to do that, but claims that people are fleeing this town, fleeing the controls and choosing to do business elsewhere are not backed up by the facts. Go outside this door, look at the development in the city and then make some reasoned judgments about what is and what is not happening in Canberra right now.

MR SESELJA: Mr Speaker, I have a supplementary question. Minister, why are communications between ACTPLA and Environment ACT so poor that they have caused significant delays to this property in Amaroo?

MR CORBELL: Last time I looked, Amaroo high school was operating. It is an open building and it is happening. It is an extremely good school. In fact, it is a quality school—the same sort of quality school this government wants to put in place in other parts of the city that deserve it.

Mrs Dunne: I rise on a point of order. The standing orders, in standing order 118, clearly say that the minister cannot debate the question. He is required to keep roughly to the terms and subject matter of the question. It is about the relationship between ACTPLA and Environment ACT, which caused delays in the approval of Amaroo school.

MR SESELJA: It is a very specific question, Mr Speaker.

MR SPEAKER: It is an abuse, Mrs Dunne, to continually raise points of order that are really not points of order. Mr Corbell was referring to Amaroo school. Amaroo school was the subject of the question.

MR CORBELL: Of course, the issue Mr Seselja raises is the issue of referral agencies, where the Planning and Land Authority must seek the advice of other agencies within the government in the process of determining an application for development. I do not know where Mr Seselja has been for the past six months or so since the government outlined its directions for planning system reform. If he had had a bit of a look, if he had bothered to actually open the consultation documents or maybe even show up to a meeting of the planning and environment committee, which I know he does not exactly have a crystal clear record on, he would have seen that one of the requirements of planning system reform is to put in place timeframes and time limits for referral agencies to provide clear and absolute advice on their requirements. Whether it is trees, waste, roads or traffic—you name it—those timeframes are being put in place as part of the reform process.

This government understands the issues. This government understood the issue well ahead of Mr Seselja stumbling upon it and has put proposals in place. I look forward to the Liberal Party's support for these measures when they come before the Assembly. But, when it comes to absolutely anything which is positive and proactive, we know what the response of the Liberal Party will be: it will be to oppose them, in the same way that they oppose new schools for West Belconnen—

Mr Seselja interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Mr Seselja, I warn you!

MR CORBELL: in the same way that they oppose better public transport and in the same way that they oppose tree protection. We have exactly the same approach from the Liberal Party. They will oppose for the sake of opposing because they are driven by a faction which is negative, which is reactionary, which is conservative and which has nothing to offer the people of Canberra.

Housing affordability

DR FOSKEY: My question is to the Minister for Disability, Housing and Community Services. Minister, you have claimed, including in the report entitled “Progress on affordable housing in the ACT” of 30 June, that a spike in the rental vacancy rate to 5.6 per cent in December 2004 indicated a softening in the private rental market that was likely to lead to greater affordability. Could you please explain why you have chosen to ignore more recent data regarding the vacancy rate which saw it drop to a record low of 2.3 per cent in the March quarter, with a marginal change to 2.5 per cent in the June quarter, which contradicts your prediction of any softening and any likelihood of improved affordability?

MR HARGREAVES: One of the big issues for us at the moment is the affordability of housing for people on low incomes, ones quite likely to be even lower with the imminent industrial relations reform. People with disabilities are going to be \$122 a week worse off, thanks very much to the federal government’s IR reforms. They will be in a lesser position to be able to afford to rent in the private marketplace than they are at the moment.

I respond to Dr Foskey by saying that predictions are predictions, but there is a reality out there and the reality out there is that the market is one for the home owners, not one for the persons doing the renting. With a very low vacancy rate, rents can be higher than they would be with a higher vacancy rate. That is quite clear. It concerns me that the rents in this town are so high—such that people on low incomes just cannot afford to rent in the private marketplace and are coming onto the public housing list.

I can, through a variety of initiatives, influence the cost of public housing rentals, but the private sector also have to accept some responsibility in this regard. The private sector have to consider whether they actually have a social responsibility attached to them for the profits that they are reaping from those rental properties. I suggest to you, Mr Speaker, that they do.

Mr Smyth: They are paying off the loans.

Mrs Burke: Yes, looking after their own retirement. That would be terrible!

MR HARGREAVES: Mr Speaker, could you do something about the hum, please?

MR SPEAKER: Order! There are too many conversations going on.

Mr Pratt: He is not stimulating us.

MR HARGREAVES: Mr Speaker, I could soon fix that, but I shall resist the temptation.

MR SPEAKER: Just come to the subject matter of the question.

MR HARGREAVES: Mr Speaker, instead of having complaints from those opposite and occasionally from the crossbench, whilst acknowledging Dr Foskey’s particular

commitment to those people who cannot afford to rent in the private marketplace, and I do that quite sincerely, what is required when we talk about affordable housing is that we talk about the extent to which the disposable income of low income people enables them to afford it. At the moment, the influences that we have over the private sector are somewhat limited. That is why I have been talking about bringing all of the stakeholders and players together in February to discuss this subject globally. I hope that Dr Foskey will express some interest in that.

I have been talking to the community as part of my consultation process, a consultation process that is foreign to those opposite. They do not know how to do it. They have the old consultation process of telling people how they are going to do things but not actually doing anything. They do not actually talk to people. They tell them how things are going to go. The Chief Minister has already articulated in this place stacks of times how their consultation process is one way.

We actually engage with the community as part of a social compact that this government has and, to that end, I have had a number of consultation activities about affordable housing, about rental levels and about the difficulties for tenants in the private and public sectors. I have had a number of those and they have been particularly well attended and I have had quite a number of discussions with groups such as ACT Shelter and the tenants union. But we need also to understand what we can do about this subject, notwithstanding, as the Minister for Planning just indicated for those who are interested, that if you go outside and look at the skyline all you will see is cranes. What do you think they are building, Mr Speaker? They are actually building apartment blocks. There is, in fact, a glut of units under construction.

MR SPEAKER: Order! The minister's time has expired.

DR FOSKEY: I have a supplementary question. Since the March quarter data certainly was available well before the report dated 30 June was tabled, could the minister please explain why his departmental officers did not access that data and what he will do to address that in the future?

MR HARGREAVES: The Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services has, in the context of the housing component of the department, the greatest bunch of officers committed to trying to address affordable housing in this town. They are professionals and I take offence at the slight.

Sustainable transport plan

MR GENTLEMAN: My question is to the Minister for Planning. I understand that yesterday the government reached a milestone of 21,845 adult patronage boardings on ACTION buses. Can the minister tell the Assembly about the recent initiatives the government has taken to demonstrate its commitment to the sustainable transport plan?

MR CORBELL: I thank Mr Gentleman for the question. Unlike those opposite, this government has a commitment to improve public transport choices for the people of Canberra. I am really pleased and excited by the level of patronage we are achieving.

Yesterday, a new record was set, again, for adult patronage on ACTION—over 21,840 boardings—in a single day. That is a significant increase on what we had seen in previous years and certainly a significant increase compared to the case under previous governments. ACTION's adult patronage continues to grow. Over the past month ACTION has seen growth of 13 per cent compared to last year. Obviously, there are very strong levels of interest in public transport.

It would be remiss of me not to bring to the attention of the Assembly that, obviously, the increase in petrol prices over the past six months has had an impact. But I would like to stress also that we have seen sustained increases in public transport usage for the past two years. That is down to a strong commitment by the government to continue to build the public transport infrastructure in this city.

The one fare, anywhere scheme was introduced. That significantly lowered fares for people and saw an immediate increase in public transport usage. More importantly, and more recently, we have also increased the number of express commuter services, the Xpresso services—peak-hour, direct services for adults. Those have proved to be extremely successful and the main reason why we are seeing growth in patronage. Given the ongoing increases in petrol prices, we have the opportunity to continue to send home the message that not only does ACTION provide a very safe and comfortable service but it also provides a very reliable and frequent service, especially during the peak hour period.

ACTION has this week commenced a new advertising campaign of 15-second ads on commercial television in Canberra. That campaign will reinforce to people the availability of the Xpresso services. That commenced on Sunday, 18 September. It will run for a five-week period. Again, the advertisement is designed to emphasise that public transport is cheaper than paying for petrol and paying for parking; it is efficient; it is timely; and it will get you to and from work during peak times very well. We will continue to run these advertisements and to promote public transport in the same way as we will continue to invest in public transport to the extent that we have previously and to meet our commitments in terms of the projects we committed to in the most recent budget.

It is probably worth highlighting also that ACTION has recently won two very significant awards for its ongoing marketing activity. The International Association of Public Transport's golden angel award for marketing 2004-05 was awarded to ACTION for the most effective passenger transit market campaign of the year, its flexibus campaign, which ran earlier this year. The Public Relations Institute of Australia also provided an award for excellence for the marketing communications campaign for ACTION's flexibus service.

ACTION is starting to lead the way in providing quality public transport in Canberra; it is lifting its image; it is growing more patronage; it is getting more people to use public transport. That is good. That is good for a more sustainable city. That is good for reducing car and energy use in our city and for reducing greenhouse gases in our city.

I am very pleased to report to the Assembly on the most recent milestone of 21,845 boardings in a single day, the highest ever for ACTION buses.

Bushfires—rebuilding

MRS BURKE: My question is directed to the Chief Minister. There are no commonwealth government impediments, including from the NCA, affecting the rebuilding of the public housing properties burnt down at Pierces Creek as a result of the 2003 bushfires. What are the impediments at the territory government level?

MR STANHOPE: As I think all members are aware, the ACT government has been vigorously pursuing the possibility of rebuilding all three of the rural villages so severely impacted by the 2003 fire. Immediately post the fire, I commissioned a study of the ACT's non-urban areas and of all the infrastructure destroyed outside the urban area, including specific studies in relation to the three villages of Stromlo, Uriarra and Pierces Creek. We were determined to do all that we reasonably could to ensure that we could replace the homes destroyed and seek to recreate the communities so severely affected at Stromlo, Uriarra and Pierces Creek.

Members are aware of the detailed work—which I can paraphrase as “sustainability studies”—undertaken by the shaping our territory group in relation to each of the villages. Quite rightly and appropriately, the issues looked at went to the sustainability—the future, the creation—of genuine communities, in the real sense of the word, in each of those places, a fundamental recommendation relating to all aspects of sustainability, not just sustainability in an environmental sense, not just cost benefit, but sustainability in the sense of creating sustainable communities; communities that would endure, and have a heart and a future.

The upshot of that was a recommendation that at Stromlo we should restore a village of 40 houses, at least; that at Uriarra we should seek to create a village of a minimum of 100 houses; and at Pierces Creek we should seek to create a village of 50 houses, to meet all of the sustainability criteria that were a feature of that detailed work across a range of disciplines undertaken in relation to each of those places.

After some fairly rugged negotiation, the commonwealth, through the NCA, agreed to the ACT government's position in relation to Stromlo. I am thankful and grateful for the support of the NCA in relation to that. We are in the process of creating a village of 40 homes at Stromlo. We are continuing to negotiate with the commonwealth about issues of land ownership and the boundary of land. We have gone to second-stage tender in relation to the Stromlo village. I am hopeful of work commencing there in the near, rather than in the medium or distant, future.

Similarly, in relation to Uriarra, as a result of detailed negotiation and consultation with the commonwealth—at the heart of which were the sustainability studies that the ACT government had received from the shaping our territory group—sustainability studies recommended the establishment of a village of 100. On the basis and the strength of the representations made, supported by the detailed sustainability work undertaken, the commonwealth, through the NCA, has agreed to the development of a village of 100 homes at Uriarra—an increase from 24 to 100.

Yet, in relation to Pierces Creek—a village of 13 homes, a village in relation to which issues around the territory plan, the status of the land and our capacity to rebuild, the

commonwealth has maintained an intransigent position of no addition—the commonwealth, without any explanation, has simply ignored and refuses to engage in the ACT government’s commitment to the redevelopment, in a sustainable way, of a living community.

As a result of the intransigence and the deadlock, there was a joint standing committee inquiry of the federal parliament. That committee essentially recommended—not to put too fine a point on it—that the two governments come together, sit down, negotiate, deal, compromise and meet the needs of both governments and the residents of Pierces Creek. We were simply asking for 50 houses. Immediately that report was tabled—

Mrs Burke: Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Standing order 118A relates to relevance. With respect, Chief Minister, I asked you: what are the impediments at the territory government level? You have not answered the question at all yet.

MR SPEAKER: Mrs Burke, you also made some comment about the commonwealth. You cannot expect the Chief Minister to ignore the comments you made in the lead up to your question.

Mrs Burke: I’ve got 25 seconds. If the Chief Minister could answer the question—

MR SPEAKER: It was your point of order Mrs Burke.

MR STANHOPE: In relation to Pierces Creek, I compromised immediately. I moved immediately from an optimal position of 50 houses to 25. The commonwealth government refuses to budge an inch. Out of sheer stubbornness, it will not move an inch. It has not negotiated; it will not deal; it will not explain—it simply says “no”.

MR SPEAKER: The minister’s time has expired.

MRS BURKE: Mr Speaker, I have a supplementary question. Chief Minister, when will the territory government stop using the tragedy to place profit over people in this matter and formally advise the commonwealth and, more importantly, the former residents of Pierces Creek, that it intends to rebuild the lost public housing properties?

MR STANHOPE: This is the same sort of whining nastiness that has become a hallmark of Mrs Burke in this place. The sneering nastiness that underlines every statement or question made is a hallmark of yours, Mrs Burke.

Mr Quinlan: It lowers this place.

MR STANHOPE: It certainly lowers the tone and the standard.

Mr Stefaniak: Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I think “nastiness”—and he has said it about three times—is a reflection on a member.

MR SPEAKER: I think he was reflecting on the question.

MR STANHOPE: I was, but I have risen above it. But you do demean yourself, Mrs Burke. As I said, at every step, the ACT government has sought to achieve

reasonable and sustainable outcomes in relation to each of the villages. That, of course, is our hope and our continuing hope in relation to Pierces Creek.

However, as I explained yesterday, the commonwealth might stand and bluntly state—without explanation and without the provision of the advice or even the detail of the advice—that there is no legal impediment, and Mrs Burke takes this as a given. Mind you, it is a half-page report that took 13 months to deliver: two pages of background, two-thirds of a page of a report and a response. This took 13 months to write—one month per line. One month per line, it took the commonwealth to prepare this report. One month per line of response. The commonwealth says, “There is no legal impediment”, and Mrs Burke accepts it as a given. Well I do not. There is no explanation of the legal advice—the detail of it, its content—and it will not provide the legal advice itself.

As I have explained time and again, I just happen to have a contrary opinion. I have a view, an opinion, supported by my officials, on the basis of the territory plan as it stands and the categorisation of the land at Pierces Creek. It simply is not a case of ACT Housing and ACTPLA rolling up at the site of Pierces Creek and finding a place to plonk the houses, because the land is designated as land for forestry purposes. We do not have a need at Pierces Creek for a forest settlement.

Mrs Burke: Now we’re getting to the truth.

MR SPEAKER: Order! Mrs Burke.

MR STANHOPE: The land is designated for forestry purposes. We do not have a forestry purpose at Pierces Creek any longer. It is an historical position. The village was constructed for the purposes of forest operations. There is no longer a forest. There is no longer a need for a settlement or a depot. It was a settlement built around a forestry depot. We no longer have a forestry depot at Pierces Creek. We no longer have a forest at Pierces Creek. We no longer have forestry purposes at Pierces Creek.

My advice is that, in the absence of legitimate, designated forestry purposes, ACTPLA would not find itself able to agree to a development application to build forestry houses on land designated for forestry purposes when it is a simple fiction. That is my advice, and that is one of the difficulties.

But it is not the only difficulty in relation to this. The ACT government has a position—endorsed through cabinet—and I am not changing that position without returning to cabinet. I am not changing that position without detailed advice from my officials around all the implications, for instance, of building a 13-house village at Pierces Creek. I need to know all of the implications of returning 13 public houses to Pierces Creek.

I will not just say, “Let’s just forget about the detail. Let’s forget about all of the issues, the implications, including issues around sustainability, a genuine village, cost, infrastructure, bushfire hazard, preparedness and capacity to protect the village in the future.” These are serious, genuine issues. I need to look again at our capacity to provide the relevant infrastructure and protections for a village of 13 houses in an exposed and isolated place in an area devastated by bushfires three years ago.

I am not rushing in and rebuilding 13 houses in the light of the full range of issues that need to be taken account of, and nor would you if you were in government.

ACT Health—salary packaging

MR MULCAHY: My question is to the Minister for Health. I refer to your statement on 30 June in which you informed the Legislative Assembly that the government would go to the Australian Tax Office to see if they would give a ruling in relation to the fringe benefits taxation implications and the legitimacy of the salary packing arrangements applying in ACT Health. Would you advise the outcome of your approach to the ATO?

MR CORBELL: I will take the question on notice.

MR MULCAHY: Are you able to indicate if you have had to make any subsequent changes to salary packing arrangements based on this or any other advice?

MR CORBELL: I will take the question on notice.

Magistrates Court—liaison staff

MR STEFANIAK: My question is to the Attorney-General and minister for corrective services. Several magistrates, including the Chief Magistrate, have spoken out against the decision to move corrective services court liaison staff out of the Magistrates Court, saying that it has delayed hearings, added to legal aid costs and could lead to people being held in custody for additional periods.

Minister, why was this decision taken? Have any additional written reports been ordered by magistrates since the move of the court liaison staff from the Magistrates Court? Have there been any additional delays to court procedures caused by this decision?

MR STANHOPE: I thank the shadow attorney for the question. Certainly I am aware of reports of expressions of concern in relation to changed arrangements for corrective services liaison officers within the court.

It is very simple. The ACT government did not impose on the courts, as it did on almost every other department and agency in the ACT, a five per cent efficiency dividend through the last budget. A number of agencies were excluded from the five per cent efficiency dividend. To the extent that we excluded some agencies, such as the court, other agencies of course picked up a disproportionate burden in relation to the government's fiscal needs in the cut that they were asked to bear. Corrective services was one such organisation. Corrective services as an organisation did not benefit from my largesse to exclude it from the five per cent efficiency dividend.

In order to meet its efficiency dividend, ACT Corrective Services had to take some hard decisions. One of the hard decisions was to remove from the courts the liaison officer position. I am aware of comments that the Chief Magistrate and others have made in relation to this. Their comments have not, of course, been accompanied by an offer to fund the positions for corrective services. I think we need to bear that in mind.

Everybody would like more money. I get a request a week, if not a day, for more money from across the board. Questions that you ask every day in this place go to, "Why don't you spend more money on this or that?" Of course, these are the hard decisions of government. There is a need to prioritise the provision of services. Always remember that we did not take a cent off the courts through the last budget round, but we took five per cent off corrective services.

The Chief Magistrate and the magistrates and the Chief Justice, along with others, bid regularly, through our formal processes, for additional funds for different projects and to meet their genuine and obvious costs. Every other organisation and agency with the ACT government does the same. At the end of the day, Mr Stefaniak, as a minister in a former ACT government, you know that tough, uncompromising decisions need to be made when resources are limited. In this case, corrective services has responded to a direction to reduce its expenditure by five per cent.

Mr Stefaniak: It's moved them to another building.

MR STANHOPE: Yes. It has done that to save costs. Corrective services has met the request made of it to find five per cent. It is an across-the-board cut. It is a brutal business, but for the sake of good government and the government's commitment to the bottom line and our determination to take the hard decisions when good government demands it of us, we have made those expenditure decisions, and we stand by them. There will be some pain along the way. I find it ironic that an organisation that was not asked to suffer any of the pain is criticising decisions taken by organisations that did.

MR STEFANIAK: I ask a supplementary question. Attorney, how much has this move reduced the efficiency of corrective services court liaison staff?

MR STANHOPE: It has certainly had an impact. I do not think it is quantifiable. I do not think I can measure the effect or the impact. To the extent that you can equate efficiency with a loss of productivity or, say, a cost, this is a question you could ask me in respect of every ACT agency that has been required to make cuts. You cannot always do that.

One of the very positive aspects of demands that governments make from time for efficiency is precisely that, that the process and the operations become more efficient. It is not just a question of a five per cent cut equating to a five per cent reduction in service. At the end of the day that is not necessarily what we seek to achieve. We talk about an efficiency dividend. It is about seeking more and better with the same or less. So I am not prepared to concede at all that there has been any reduction in efficiency of operations. It is just a new and different way of providing the same service. It is a new and different way that has not met with the immediate applause of the Chief Magistrate, but that is not to suggest that the system is any less efficient.

Water—Cotter catchment

MS MacDONALD: My question is to the Chief Minister, Mr Stanhope. Could the Chief Minister advise the Assembly about progress on the project to transfer water from the

Cotter catchment to the Googong reservoir? How will this increase the security of Canberra's water supply?

MR STANHOPE: I am grateful to Ms Macdonald for the question. I am grateful, in fact, for any question that causes the opposition in general and particularly Mrs Dunne to squirm in continuing embarrassment, as any discussion around dams and water storage does—the Tennent dam advocate. I will never forget the last election campaign and the claim made by the Leader of the Opposition then: “If elected, we will commence construction of the Tennent dam the day after the election. We don't care whether or not the hydrology would justify the construction of a dam at Tennent, we don't care whether climate change would affect the capacity to fill the dam; we will build the dam.” I thank Ms MacDonald for the question. Any opportunity to enjoy Mrs Dunne's very apparent discomfiture at the enormous mistake of judgment inherent in her attitude to water and water storage gives me a gratuitous but perhaps not particularly spiritual sort of glee.

As has been previously discussed—and I am very happy to give an update on the progress—progress in relation to the completion of the water transfer system from the Cotter catchment to the Googong catchment is extremely good; it is exceeding our expectations. It is a major piece of work. The distance over which the tonnage of rock has to be removed from the Googong water treatment facility into the Googong dam is only short. But it is quite deep, and it is solid rock.

It has been a major engineering feat, as has been the lateral thinking involved in the decision to transfer water through this system. The reticulation model that has been developed by Actew in this particular instance is a great piece of engineering in progress. To the extent that the project underscores the capacity of engineers, in particular, employed by Actew, and Actew staff broadly, it is a wonderful commendation for all of them.

This simple expedient of simply reversing a couple of pumps, providing the capacity, through the size of the pipes, to transfer up to 150 megalitres a day when the project is completed some time in the next weeks is a major piece of engineering. It is a fantastic piece of lateral thinking; and it provides very much the sort of result the government was looking for through its commitment in think water, act water—our water strategy of putting off for as long as we possibly can, for the whole range of reasons why you would put off this decision, the construction of another dam. If we can put it off forever, what a fantastic achievement by the ACT government that would be.

Through just this one expedient, an expedient that has been delivered in a number of months, at a cost of no more than about \$20 million, the capacity to deliver 150 megalitres of water a day that is currently flowing out of the territory, down the Murrumbidgee—consistent, nevertheless, with our environmental flows—is an absolutely fantastic achievement. That 150 megalitres a day is 40 megalitres more than our winter daily consumption; it is consistent with our autumn and spring consumption; and it is only 50 megalitres less than our summer consumption. That is what we are talking about. We are talking about the capacity to transfer from a catchment, which is producing excess water, into a giant tank, essentially, in the Googong catchment almost our average daily water needs. We will be able to do that for all those months in which we have that excess supply in the Cotter catchment. It is a fantastic achievement by Actew.

I should not take gratuitously and with glee Mrs Dunne's discomfiture in relation to this, but I just cannot help myself. I do. It highlights again and again the absurdity of the position the Liberal Party took to the last election, and that Mrs Dunne has sought, against all odds, all logic and all commonsense, to maintain—a sense that we are going to build that dam no matter what; whether or not we need it, we are going to build it because we said we would and it is too embarrassing to have to admit we made a most enormous mistake in the position that we took on this issue.

MR SPEAKER: The minister's time has expired.

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

Supplementary answers to questions without notice

Disaster planning

MR HARGREAVES: Yesterday, in answer to a question relating to the bomb scare across the road, I said that I would seek additional information. I have additional information that I would like to advise the Assembly of in order to enhance the question from Mr Pratt today.

At 2.30 pm on Wednesday, 7 September 2005, police received a report of a threatening phone call made to the office of the ACT Chief Minister. The caller requested the address of the ACT Legislative Assembly so that he could deliver a bomb. He did not know where we were. At 5.38 pm on the same day, police communications received a report of an unattended backpack located outside the ACT government shopfront on London Circuit in the city. This area is within 60 metres of the ACT Legislative Assembly. Police responded to the report of a suspicious backpack, with the knowledge in mind of the earlier threat relating to the ACT Legislative Assembly.

In accordance with AFP/ACT Policing policy, procedures and practice, the area was isolated, cordoned off and contained to reduce the risk to members of the public. A general duties patrol from city station attended, followed by the AFP/ACT Policing specialist response and security bomb response team which was called in to assess the backpack.

Retail trading in the vicinity had ceased for the day and owners and operators of businesses were in the processes of securing their premises. In the interest of public safety, responding police advised ACTION bus services and Aerial Taxi Cabs Coop to avoid the area. Responding police also spoke to the occupiers of office blocks on the northern aspect of London Circuit adjoining the ACT government shopfront and advised them of the incident. Based on this advice, self-evacuation procedures were implemented.

Police observed occupants of the ACT Legislative Assembly building watching events from the ground floor of the building, behind large panels of glass. As a precautionary measure, police attended the Legislative Assembly and spoke to security personnel located in the main foyer. Security personnel were then asked to ensure that the ground floor on the northern aspect was clear of occupants and offered to assist in this process.

This offer was declined, and the ACT Legislative Assembly security personnel attended the area and ensured that the area was clear.

Police managing the incident were satisfied that this request was effectively carried out as the area was cleared within a short period of time and was not reoccupied. Police did not advise personnel in the remainder of the Legislative Assembly building to either self-evacuate or make a determination directing evacuation to be required.

Personnel from the specialist response and security bomb response team are subject-matter authorities on the management of suspicious packages and conducted a series of tests that identified that the backpack presented no risk. Another set of inquiries was also conducted that identified the owner of the backpack and, as such, no criminal offences were disclosed.

The establishment of perimeters in response to a suspected improvised explosive device is an objective decision based on a number of variables. Predominant considerations include the size of the articles being managed, the rationale being that the size of the article could equate to the amount of explosive material potentially contained within. Different types of explosives do, however, have varying ignition methods and explosive power velocity or capacity.

Another consideration is the environment where the incident is being managed. For example, a blast would travel over a greater distance in a rural context as there are fewer physical obstructions to absorb the force. In relation to an urban context, brick and concrete structures can provide safety. However, glass and similar materials present an increased risk of injury or death as a result of fragmentation.

The setting of perimeters is based on assessment of these variables and available intelligence information. I repeat that: the setting of perimeters is based on the assessment of these variables and available intelligence information. An investigation into the initial threatening phone call made to the Chief Minister's office is continuing. This is the information conveyed to me by the Chief Police Officer of the ACT, and I have every confidence that the police have handled the matter appropriately.

Answers to questions on notice

Question No 486

MRS DUNNE: Under standing order 118A, I seek an explanation from the acting minister for education in relation to question on notice No 486 which became overdue on 17 September.

MR STANHOPE: I do not have available to me an explanation. It is quite possible that the matter is awaiting the return of the minister for education who is currently occupied by matters of a personal nature.

Auditor-General's report No 4 of 2005

Mr Speaker presented the following paper:

Auditor-General Act—Auditor-General's Report No 4 2005—Courts Administration, dated 20 September 2005.

MR CORBELL (Molonglo—Minister for Health and Minister for Planning, and Acting Minister for Children, Youth and Family Support, Acting Minister for Women and Acting Minister for Industrial Relations) (3.37): I ask for leave to move a motion to authorise publication of Auditor-General's report No 4 of 2005.

Leave granted.

MR CORBELL: I move:

That the Assembly authorises the publication of the Auditor-General's Report No 4 2005.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Local retail and community services

DR FOSKEY (Molonglo) (3.38): I move:

That this Assembly:

- (1) recognises the vital importance of retail and community services to the social fabric of our suburbs;
- (2) supports a planning regime which strengthens the viability of local shops and schools;
- (3) rejects intense residential development of core areas in suburbs that lack shops, schools and community facilities; and
- (4) calls on the ACT government to:
 - (a) commit to building and supporting the viability of local centres; and
 - (b) make that commitment one of the terms of reference for its review of Variation No 200 to the Territory Plan.

I would like to start by quoting from an article in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on the weekend of 23-24 July. In reporting on a report released by the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources in that state, called *Which Sydney suburbs work*, the author of the article says that the report says:

... ditch almost every planning principle that has been in vogue in Sydney for the past 15 years. Tomorrow's neighbourhoods, say the planners who are plotting hundreds of new suburbs for 160,000 people, will draw on features from some of our oldest towns and villages in an effort to bring back life and safety. And they will aim to replace what has become an insular, fortress mentality of many residents.

It is a back-to-the-future policy that aims to re-create village squares amid a mix of developments. Schools will be near shops, and walking encouraged over driving.

When the ACT Greens supported the passage of the garden city variation to the territory plan, variation 200, we did so having made a number of agreements with the ACT government. Those conditions were: the ruling out of unit titling for dual occupancy in the suburban areas; an improved neighbourhood planning process, incorporating recognition of heritage interest; the implementation of a sustainable-design pilot project using one of the greenfields suburbs; better support for high-quality, sustainable design, with a focus on best practice, innovation and performance indicators for sustainability; and an evaluation of effectiveness of draft variation—now variation—200 in two years.

This is not the debate to examine how well the government has kept its side of the agreement. I can only say that majority government certainly makes the notion of calling the government to account over these matters particularly exhausting. But it is worth recapping a little on the intentions behind variation 200. The key rationale for separating core areas around local, group and town centres is to promote ecologically sustainable development, where transport links can encourage public transport; socially sustainable development, through ensuring the viability of neighbourhood shops and facilities; and promoting a more walkable living environment, with services accessible to all people.

Along with that model for development in our suburbs came a commitment to neighbourhood planning. It was always clear that the suburbs under most development pressure at the time, in 2002, namely, the inner north and then the inner south, would be the first to be taken through a neighbourhood planning process to finetune the suburban zoning. But the very clear implication at the time was that such a process would be rolled out across Canberra.

It was quite soon after the passage of the variation, in mid-2003, that the ACT government began its abandonment of neighbourhood planning and, it appears, formal community involvement in planning altogether. Aranda is a particular victim of that betrayal. Any neighbourhood planning process of integrity would have resolved that Aranda, with no local centre left, to speak of, therefore, had no site for core development.

My motion today is, of course, inspired by the recent developments, or the mooted developments, at Giralang. But there are many other locations around Canberra that may face similar problems. Macgregor, Aranda, Latham and Scullin in Belconnen spring to mind; Hackett in the inner north; perhaps Downer; and perhaps in the south we might be talking about suburbs like Rivett and Lyons, though I do not want to send businesses packing from there. But those are shopping centres that are perhaps experiencing shaky viability.

What happens is that, as shops close and there is less and less activity in shopping centres, vandalism and other damages follow. Disused and underused centres become no-go areas, instead of the friendly, safe places that they should be. But redeveloping them for residential purposes, while it might overcome these problems of a deserted space, sets up another less visible and more insidious range of problems. The challenge really is about maintaining viable community facilities and shops around which more intensive residential development can grow. And that faces a particular challenge if the shops and facilities are not well maintained and if they can be sold off for residential development.

Giralang is an interesting case in point. It has valuable health care facilities, a lively school, an extraordinarily busy service station and, until recently, a viable and valuable family tavern. Anyone who has visited that centre would immediately notice that the shops had not been maintained, let alone upgraded, for quite a long time. Clearly, for the owner, who also ran the supermarket for some time, the opportunity to get out of running a shopping centre and capitalise on the appreciated land value that comes with poor area zoning was hard to resist.

When this first blew up in the media, the planning minister made the point that how we live our lives has changed and that the design of suburbs, with local schools and shops and the presumption of mothers at home with the kids, is really a thing of the past. There is a point in that, but such an analysis, if it ends there, is superficial. There are still mothers at home and fathers, part time perhaps, running business from home on occasion, or studying. And there are, of course, their children. There is also a growing population of ageing people who would like to stay independent or semi-independent for a longer time and people who are ill or live with disabilities and for whom neither full-time care nor full employment is possible or desirable.

If we allow the core of our suburbs to be transformed into apartment complexes with secure parking, then those people who live in our suburbs, rather than sleep in them, will become isolated. It ignores the interaction between people and place. We know that some suburbs have revived and achieved lively centres. Attracting the right businesses that are prepared to respond to the needs of local communities or set up niche businesses that bring people from elsewhere has proved to be the secret to success.

Isolation and disadvantage are real problems in affluent and mobile communities like ours, and one of the responsibilities of planners is to be alert to those dangers and to build a stronger dimension of social and cultural planning into their processes. It is not a matter of social engineering; it is a question of community care.

I also question the notion that localities are not important to young people. There is growing affirmation that, even in times of a supposedly international understanding of the world, most people are still defined by their place. While parents may drive their children continually from one location to another to link up with friends from across town or to engage in a range of classes and organised activities, that is not the most desirable or the most sustainable way for people to live; nor is it inevitable.

Last week I was host to a forum here at the Assembly about the unhealthy impact of our reliance on cars. It was a presentation by Sarah Hind from the National Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health at the ANU. One of the many telling pieces of research that she referred to was the greater health benefit to children of free play over structured sports and physical activities and the decided benefits for children from such structured activity if they walked to the event rather than were driven to it. In the context of burgeoning obesity, just that one piece of research alone is a pointer to the importance of ensuring our suburbs are able to offer a way of living which is sociable and offers physically opportunities.

I would also like to consider the role of neighbourhood schools. Narrabundah primary school is a small school that fulfils an extraordinarily important role for its community.

Lyons primary school, a small school threatened with closure more than once, was all over the front page of the *Canberra Times* recently for its bilingual English/Italian education program. That school has a wide mix of students from across the socio-economic spectrum. It has managed to deliver extraordinary educational outcomes to those students, due to an ethic of care, in part due to its size as well as the quality and commitment of the school staff and community and, it should be said, the support of the Italian government for its bilingual program. If the ACT government ensured a reasonable supply of mixed public and private housing on the site of the old Burnie Court, there could easily be more children moving into the area to become a part of that community.

There is a way that communities and government services can work together for mutual benefit, and the mechanisms of planning and of community involvement in that planning have an important part to play. In this context, I must say that the government's planning system reform project is a concern because it is moving much faster than people in the community on whom it will impact are aware. There are many questions about the shift away from lease-purpose controls to broad-brush zoning, for example, that might well result in market-driven changes that are socially destructive and see us lose community involvement and control over our infrastructure and the location of our services. I have been working with the Greens and a range of community partners to explore these issues further over the next few months and perhaps open up a wider range in the exploration of the presumptions underpinning it.

This motion asks only for the government to make a commitment to support the viability of local shops and facilities and to ensure that such a concern is part of the brief for the review of variation 200 that is presently under way. I notice that the Minister for Planning's amendment sidesteps the inclusion of these issues in the review of variation 200. That is disappointing.

When we think of a lively city, we need to realise that it is not just Civic that we are talking about. We see too much focus there, while we seem to be prepared to let our suburbs die. This reduces the quality of life for those people who are not so loud and noisy and their complaints are not heard. They are not the people who can get out or even want to get out and enjoy the city centre's fleshpots, bars and cafes. There is more to life than this anyway. There is the casual encounter at the local supermarket where the proprietor addresses you by name. For some people, that could be the only human contact they have in a day. Take away that supermarket and their social interaction may be reduced to zero.

It is interesting that, while we in this city are talking about concerns about areas like west Belconnen and proposing a particular kind of school, we need to look at the broader issues related to that because this is also one area where local centres are under threat. Perhaps more than ever, those places need that concern. I note that Charnwood has a revived shopping centre and that it also has a much-revived primary school. We can see the community spirit there.

It is very hard to say which comes first. Does the community spirit come from having a viable suburban centre or does the community spirit create it? I think it is a cyclic process. I do not think we should say, "This is the trend that is happening; therefore, this is the way that planning must go." Let us look at the work that has been done in New

South Wales—after all, we are just a hole in the middle of it—and realise that we should think about this too: that some of the old ways of planning suburbs did work; that it is important that we have ways that people can come together, especially when we have a demographic trend which is going to see more and more people living on their own and becoming isolated, whether they like it or not.

I commend my motion. I am sorry that the government has seen fit to seek to amend it, because I believe that we should always be self-critical in these things, whether we are in government or not. This is a motion that I believe is not too difficult for the government to agree to.

MR CORBELL (Molonglo—Minister for Health and Minister for Planning, and Acting Minister for Children, Youth and Family Support, Acting Minister for Women and Acting Minister for Industrial Relations) (3.53): I thank Dr Foskey for moving this motion today. She raises a number of very important issues around the provision of local shops, of small-scale retail activities in suburban areas. The government recognises that these are services, these are land uses, which help bind our communities together. They provide that opportunity for casual, local interaction, for recognition at a local level and help build a sense of community. And the government remains committed to ensuring that these facilities are provided.

The government, though, also recognises that the way services and local centres were provided and planned for in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s was in a very different context from the times that we face now. So the challenge for us, as a community, is to maintain local services, local retail activity, whilst also ensuring that that type of activity remains viable and an attractive option for people to invest in and to provide. Whilst we, as a whole, view our local shops as a community service, they are also a business; they are also a commercial proposition that has to stack up commercially if they are going to remain available to us to use and to get direct and indirect benefits from.

Dr Foskey makes one important mistake in her speech where she suggests that the provisions of variation 200 to the territory plan have enabled redevelopment to occur at these local centres. That is simply incorrect. The local centres are not governed by residential land use policies, which is what variation 200 deals with. Local centres, group centres and town centres are dealt with by different provisions of the territory plan that deal with local centres, group centres and town centres.

The local centre policy, which is in place now and permits residential alongside retail uses, is a provision of the territory plan that was agreed to way back in 1996 or 1997. It was a unanimous position of this Assembly. In fact, all members, including crossbench and independent members, agreed with that approach. What that approach said was that local centres should remain as areas that provide retail activity but that they should also have the capacity for some residential activity within that retail context. Essentially the proposal was a mixed-use development.

A mixed-use development can provide the best of both worlds. It can provide the retail activity. It can also provide some residential activity as well as retail activity that allow the owner or owners of the centre to get the capital they need to refurbish the retail activity. It also allows for greater levels of physical activity and activity from people throughout the week, including and especially at night. That was the policy objective that

the Assembly agreed to back in 1996 and that governs the future renewal of retail centres such as the local shops to this day.

The government wants to see strong, vibrant local centres maintained. Where we have issues with centres such as at Giralang or Aranda, the government's view is that the provisions of the territory plan are appropriate; that some level of residential activity alongside retail activity can work and can deliver really good outcomes. I have seen plenty of examples nationally and internationally that mixed-use development can work and can work really well. Local communities can still have the retail facilities they expect, the convenience shopping they expect and a lively centre with residential uses.

The challenge is to make that policy work in practice. For example, in relation to Giralang, the government has said very clearly to the proposed developers there, "Do not expect to just deliver a little corner store and that is all you are going to need to do. Expect to be required to deliver a comprehensive range of retailing or opportunities for retailing as well as residential, if that is the path you want to go down." That is what communities expect. I think we have to lift the bar, from the experience of Latham, which is just a corner store; we have to expect more. That is the message that I have communicated and the government has communicated both to the residents who have concerns about Giralang and to the potential proponents.

The reason that I have foreshadowed that the government will amend this motion is to take account of some of the issues that Dr Foskey raises which, again, are incorrect. For example, she makes the assertion in her motion at point 3:

rejects intense residential development of core areas in suburbs that lack shops, schools and community facilities;

First of all, development in core areas is not intense. Development in core areas is dual occupancy or triple occupancy; it is two storeys; and it may or may not involve block consolidation. That is not intense development. Yes, it is a higher level of density, but it is not high density. I think it is quite misleading to suggest that it is in any way intense.

Secondly, and just as importantly, when you look at where core areas were put in place through variation 200, they were not put into suburbs that did not have a local shop and were not in proximity to a larger shopping centre. For example, Aranda has core areas. It has core areas predominantly because of its proximity to the Jamison group centre. Stirling does not have a local shopping centre—it never has had one—but it also has core areas because of the proximity of parts of Stirling to the Weston group centre. Dr Foskey's assertion is simply incorrect on that point, and that is why I have foreshadowed an amendment that deals with that issue.

In terms of the evaluation of the effectiveness of the garden city provisions, the government is meeting its commitment that we made to Kerrie Tucker, as a representative of the Greens in this place, to do that after a set period of time. This evaluation is not meant to be a revisitation of the whole policy; it does not say that the policy is no longer needed or that the policy is not appropriate: we believe that the policy setting is appropriate. But it is about evaluating it, finetuning it and improving its operation.

I would like to go through the extent of some of that evaluation process. The objectives of the evaluation process include determining which provisions provide benefit to the community and those that have generated, or may generate, adverse development outcomes; testing the adverse provisions and working out solutions to them; developing a draft evaluation paper, which will be used for discussion with industry groups, community councils, the Planning and Land Council and the broader public; and a final evaluation report, which will be provided to the Assembly.

The scope of this process includes a review of comments raised by the public in regard to development applications and neighbourhood planning issues; summarising findings and advice given by the Planning and Land Council, the AAT, ACTPLA itself and the Supreme Court in relation to any matters that have been dealt with as they relate to the garden city provisions; a review of multiunit development applications before and after the application of variation 200, including numbers, locations, quality of applications, objection numbers, proportion of dual occupancies to other multiunit development and so on; the consideration of how development responds to narrow frontage blocks; termini of cul de sacs; relationships to main roads—all issues that have been raised by the Planning and Land Council; testing these garden city provisions to determine problems; and taking into account comments received during the public consultation process as part of the evaluation.

As you can see, Mr Speaker, there is already a very broad exercise that is going to be put into place and is being put into place right now. I have agreed to that scope and the terms of reference. And that process will do the work that we said would be done to evaluate the effectiveness of the garden city provisions. For that reason, the government does not believe that we need to take the approaches outlined by Dr Foskey in her motion. And it is for that reason that I am foreshadowing an amendment to the motion.

It is worth highlighting and dwelling a little on how local centres are performing now compared to some years ago. Over time, as Dr Foskey rightly acknowledges, there have been significant changes in consumer spending patterns, and these have particularly impacted on the local centre level of our retail hierarchy. The proportion of retail expenditure at local centres has fallen from around 20 per cent of all retail expenditure in the early 1970s to less than 10 per cent today. In effect, the total level of expenditure at local centres has been almost halved since most local centres were built. And that clearly has an impact on their viability and clearly has an impact on their role.

This is being driven by a range of social and economic changes, including an ageing population; a decrease in the average household size—fewer families with children, for example; an increase in female workforce participation, which is particularly marked here in the ACT. There are also longer trading hours for some of the larger supermarkets in our group centres, town centres and Civic. Also, there is an increasing consumer preference for variety and convenience of one-stop shopping at larger competing supermarkets.

There are changes in consumer preferences and retail patterns, including an increased dominance of fresh food retailing and pre-prepared foods, the incorporation of uses such as butchers and bakeries into larger supermarkets. There is also an ongoing rationalisation of smaller services such as banks and post offices that previously were

also key tenants in many small local centres. Increased co-ownership—and there has been an increase in co-ownership since the 1970s—has also driven changes in retail spending habits.

All of these issues highlight that our local centres have to adapt. The important thing is that we have a planning framework that allows that adaptation whilst also recognising that they continue to serve a fundamental role in providing a social focus for a suburb as well as convenience retailing for a suburb.

I believe the policy setting is pretty much right. I believe, and the government believes, that the renewal policies in place in the territory plan provide the right balance. We have to make sure we apply them rigorously; we have to make sure that proponents who come in proposing redevelopment of centres maintain a strong level of retailing activity as well as any residential development proposed to take place.

The issues Dr Foskey raises are important. The government is conscious of these, and we believe that there is a comprehensive range of policy responses in place. It is not something that the government has complete control over as well. There is a level of commercial and market response involved. The challenge at the heart of planning policies is to be cognisant of the commercial and market issues that are at play, as well as the community expectations and community rights to convenient shopping in their suburb, in delivering the best possible outcome.

With that in mind, I now move the amendment circulated in my name to Dr Foskey's motion. I move:

Omit paragraphs (3) and (4), substitute:

- “(3) notes that the identification of core areas in general supports the viability of local centres, group centres and other community infrastructure;
- (4) notes that where A10 areas were identified in suburbs without shops, the areas were close to Group centres located in adjacent suburbs and in other areas, such as Turner, no core areas were identified;
- (5) notes the Government's commitment to building and supporting the viability of local and group centres; and
- (6) notes that the ACT Planning and Land Authority has commenced an evaluation of the effectiveness of the Garden City Variation in achieving the outcomes specified in the Government's policies on urban consolidation.”.

MR SESELJA (Molonglo) (4.07): I will speak mainly to the original motion. I do not have the amendment in front of me, but I have no doubt I know the thrust of what it says.

Mrs Dunne: It will be a self-congratulatory diatribe, as usual.

MR SESELJA: I am sure it is self-congratulatory, but I will focus more on Dr Foskey's original motion. Most of the motion is pretty straightforward. Paragraph (1) states: “recognises the vital importance of retail and community services”. That might be slightly overstating it, but I think the general intention behind that is fine. Paragraph (4)

states, in part: “calls on the ACT government to (a) commit to building and supporting the viability of local centres”. I am not quite sure what Dr Foskey is referring to there. I do not know if it is the government’s role these days to be building local centres. That is probably something that is best left to the private sector. It is probably recognised on both sides of this chamber that we have left those days behind us.

I would like to address some of the issues that Dr Foskey raised in her speech before moving on to what the minister had to say. Dr Foskey spoke, I think rightly, about the changing demographics. I saw that *Stateline* episode, in which the minister spoke about the move away from the traditional idea where the mother stays at home and walks the kids to the shops and things like that. That is true, but I think Dr Foskey rightly made the point—and the same thing occurred to me—that, while that is no longer necessarily always the case, it is still the case for many people. The population is aging and Dr Foskey’s point about the aging population wanting to see the viability of local centres maintained is well made. It is a view that I certainly support.

Dr Foskey had some things to say about cars. I know she did not get into this generally. It is wonderful if families can walk to their local sporting fields and schools and shops. I am not in the anti-car camp in the same way that Dr Foskey is and I think that for families especially it is fantastic to have access to a car to be able to get around Canberra. As good as public transport can be at times, for the average family, where people have to be taken to different places, whether it is to sport, to school, friends’ houses, other places, it is unrealistic to expect that everything in a city like Canberra is going to be found in the local neighbourhood. We certainly do not live in a place like New York where people can walk to a lot of places or get public transport to the rest. So I think it is unrealistic, and I do not see that changing significantly in the near future.

Paragraph (3) of the motion states: “rejects intense residential development of core areas in suburbs that lack shops, schools and community facilities”. Variation 200 was supported by the Greens and they need to take part of the responsibility for variation 200, as it currently stands. I know Dr Foskey often likes to talk about the Greens, rather than herself, and the Greens’ position was to support variation 200. There are some flaws in the policy, as has been highlighted by the opposition over time.

For Dr Foskey now to be saying, “Well, we do not like these parts of it,” is all well and good, but she should own the fact that the Greens did support variation 200. I am not sure of how the vote went, but my understanding is that, without the support of the Greens, variation 200 would not have passed. The crossbench and the opposition would have rejected it. That was, of course, after the unanimous finding of a committee, which included, I think, Mr Hargreaves, rejecting variation 200. This has not been something that has had unanimous support. The Greens were instrumental in getting this over the line. So the Greens need to take their share of responsibility for variation 200 as well.

In relation to what the minister had to say, the promised guidelines to A10 have not materialised, and we certainly discussed that a couple of months ago here in the Assembly. The guidelines were promised again just before the last election. We found out in the budget process that there were no guidelines for the development of A10. The minister seems to be committed to A10. He made certain promises in relation to A10 and how it would be implemented. Those promises have not been kept and there is no sign that those guidelines will be available any time soon, certainly not in this financial year.

Who knows, possibly some time in the next financial year? I think the answer from the minister was that it would be some time in the term of this Assembly, possibly some time in 2007-08.

That is one of the concerns. We have had problems with A10. When the community raised concerns, they were told, "Look, we will make sure there are guidelines to ensure there is not inappropriate development." Unfortunately, those guidelines have not been forthcoming. I again call upon the minister to tell us when he plans to keep that election promise to provide guidelines for A10.

The minister made some reasonable points, though. Local shops need to be viable and it is unrealistic at times to expect that all local shops will survive. It is certainly desirable that we maintain local shopping centres as much as possible. But I do not think it is up to the government to artificially prop up businesses that are failing. Clearly there is dispute within the community. At Giralang, the owner of the shops says it is not viable and the residents say it is; he is just running it down.

I do not know the truth of that situation but I think it is unrealistic to expect the government to be propping up unprofitable businesses. Settings can be put into place to assist local centres. I agree with the point the minister made about the liberalisation of trading hours having a bigger impact than virtually anything else on local centres, possibly even more than the demographics of the local area. The liberalisation of trading hours, which happened mainly in the 1980s and 1990s, has had a big impact and it is up to local centres now to find niches. I think Hawker is a good example of a local centre that has found a niche. It is up to individual businesses to work out what the community needs. It is not up to government. Certainly it is not up to the government to be building centres, as the Greens call for. The government cannot be propping up those businesses. I think that is a bit unrealistic.

I want to make a couple of quick points about A10. The minister seems to have changed the justification a little bit. He said that in some of those areas they do it because it is close to a group centre. The interesting example, I guess, is Downer, where the original A10 seemed to be designed to prop up the local centre in Downer. Then, early in the term of this Assembly, we saw that scaled back. It seems to be really coming back to its proximity to Dickson. That does not seem to have been the original plan, but it makes some sense.

The difficulty of propping up a local centre like Downer is apparent for all to see. With its very close proximity to Dickson, it is very difficult to maintain a local centre in a place like Downer. It is a very short walk to the Dickson shops, which has everything that people would need. A lot of the things you would expect from a local centre, such as restaurants, are at Dickson. I think the situation in Downer demonstrates some of the flawed thinking in the A10. As I said at the time, the variation to A10 for Downer was a welcome backdown, a demonstration that they did not quite get the policy right in terms of a one-size-fits-all approach. Mr Temporary Deputy Speaker, you would be aware of our deliberations in the committee.

So A10 does not always work, and we have opposed it. Interestingly, this week I heard the minister on the radio speaking about the proposed development in Belconnen. He seemed to be adopting a lot of the opposition's policy. He said, "The town centres are the

appropriate place for intensive development.” That is absolutely right. I agree with the minister wholeheartedly. I am glad he has come on board on that. It is important that we have significant development in the town centres and group centres. That, of course, results in less strain and less pressure for development in garden suburbs and other places, which is exactly the point that we have been making for some years.

From that point of view, it was good to see the minister come on board with that policy. It was a change of heart. That is something we can certainly agree on, that significant development in places like town centres and group centres will take away at least some of the demand for more intense development in local centres.

MR TEMPORARY DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Gentleman): The member’s time has expired.

MRS DUNNE (Ginninderra) (4.17): I will speak briefly to Dr Foskey’s core motion, and touch briefly on the matter referred to by Mr Seselja in his exposition. If the Greens have concerns about variation 200 to the territory plan, it is their fault. A considerable amount of time in the last Assembly was taken up by a lengthy discussion revisiting and redrawing lines in relation to variation 200. What happened in this place was that a four-member committee, including a member of the Labor Party, unanimously said that variation 200 to the territory plan was a bad idea, for such a range of reasons that it was almost irredeemable.

But the Minister for Planning, in his hubris, said, “I came into this place as the Minister for Planning and I said I was going to do this and I will do it, come what may.” There were other things that needed to be addressed in the planning system. The minister did nothing about the planning approval system until he was coming up to the election last year. On two separate occasions in this place the minister declined the challenge to do something about the Land Act. In December 2002 and in April 2003, there were specific motions in this place to reform the Land Act. He specifically declined to do it and now Mr Virtue is saying, “I’m going to do this in my time and it will be perfect.” None of the reforms this minister has instituted have improved the planning system one bit.

In December 2002, when this Assembly passed the Planning and Land Bill, I stood in this place and said, “The test of this bill will be whether the culture of the organisation and the service it provides change in the next 12 months.” It is three years down the track and nothing has changed in the culture of that organisation. Nothing has improved in the way of getting through the planning and approval system. We changed the name, we tinkered with the structure, we created a whole lot of conflicts of interest for the government inside the organisation, but nothing has changed in terms of service and the streamlining of planning approvals.

There are problems, of course, with community shops, and I agree with the minister that some of the causes of those problems are due to demographic change. But there are a lot more complex reasons than those that were touched on by the minister. Variation 200 was never going to be the answer to reviving suburban shops. We know that. We knew it from the outset. Mr Corbell knew it from the outset. The Greens in this place, in the last Assembly, allowed the minister to force through an unsatisfactory planning regime and what they got out of it is arid, bad planning results. It is a failure on all counts and now

they are sitting here trying to retrieve something from the dust and desolation of their bad policy decisions.

It was a failure by the Labor government, supported by the Greens in this place. They really need to go back to taws, go back to talking to people and trying to look forward, not to preserving what we had in the past, because preserving what we had in the past may in fact be impossible. We should be looking forward to ways to structure retailing in the ACT in the future. The Liberal Party's planning policy has always been to maintain the hierarchy of town centres and group centres. The resulting increased density of urban infill and intense residential development will make those centres vibrant. Other centres will thrive or wither according to the demands of the market.

I know that the market is anathema to the Greens, but let us look at some of the successes. Look at the Florey shops. I am sure that Mr Stefaniak uses the Florey shops on a regular basis. They are thriving. They do not do anything special, nothing out of the box. They have a hairdresser, a butcher, a real estate agent and a baker, all of those really standard things that people come to expect. On the other hand, look at Griffith. It is very much a set of speciality shops and it is absolutely thriving. You can never find a place to park at the Griffith shops.

We have some success stories, and I think the classic one in my electorate is the Melba shops. A few years ago it was burnt-out hulk. There was one chippo there that was hanging on for grim life. Somebody bought the shops and decided to sink some money into it. It is probably not in your area of commonly passed travels, Mr Temporary Deputy Speaker, but those shops have probably increased in size by 50 or 60 per cent. There are two new restaurants there and on most weekend evenings you cannot get a place to park; nor can you get a seat in those restaurants in the Melba shops, which were almost completely derelict. It was a burnt out hulk.

There have been failures. The Latham shops, I would contend, were a failure. There were many things that probably went wrong there. Mr Stefaniak said that the Macgregor shops are now pretty much completely derelict.

Mr Stefaniak: It is a hole in the ground.

MRS DUNNE: Is it now a hole in the ground? That is probably an improvement. The Greens are wringing their hands and saying, "The government ought to do something about retail policy." One of the significant contributors to the failure of retail policy was their support for variation 200.

MS PORTER (Ginninderra) (4.24): As Mr Corbell has already said, the government supports the broad intent of Dr Foskey's motion. However, it does not support several points of detail. Therefore I will be supporting Mr Corbell's amendment.

In its last term, the government spent considerable time and resources in the preparation of both the Canberra spatial plan and variation 200 to the territory plan. The Canberra spatial plan outlines a strategic direction that will help manage change and provide for growth to achieve the social, environmental and economic sustainability of Canberra.

As we know, variation 200 to the territory plan, the garden city variation, introduced new residential policies to protect the predominately low density, low rise, leafy character of most established residential areas, and we were talking about them only yesterday. At the same time, it encouraged more housing in locations that have convenient access to commercial centres, including local centres, which respond to the changing demography of our city. As Dr Foskey said, the Greens supported this approach in the government's last term.

Both documents were the subject of extensive public consultation before being adopted by the government and accepted by the Assembly. As the CEO of Volunteering ACT at the time of the consultations on the spatial plan, I well remember and appreciated the extensive and inclusive nature of the consultation on the spatial plan. Both documents recognised the vital importance of retail and community services to the social fabric of our suburbs. In this regard, the government wholly supports the first point of Dr Foskey's motion.

As Mr Corbell said, one of the objectives of the garden city provisions was to introduce a planning regime that strengthens the viability of local shops and schools. It did this by identifying residential core areas within walking distance of local shopping centres. In the core areas, residential development continues to be encouraged. At the same time, the garden city provisions provided increased protection against redevelopment in suburban areas that are located further away from local centres. I believe that is a sensible and sound policy. I think you would agree, Dr Foskey.

Through the garden city variation, the government replaced a random, ad hoc approach to the location of residential redevelopment with one that encouraged residential redevelopment in the suburbs to be close to local shops and public transport routes. This policy will help to maintain the population around the local shops and schools, thereby assisting their viability. It maintains the amenity of the suburbs and it is in line with the government's sustainable transport policy. The government has therefore already acted on Dr Foskey's second point by introducing policies and a planning regime that strengthens the viability of local shops and schools.

What the government does not support, however, is any suggestion that it introduce a planning regime that directly intervenes in the market place or assumes responsibility for the actual provision of local shops. Market forces over which the government has little influence primarily drive the viability of local shops. The concept that the government deliberately sets out to create situations where local shops close, Dr Foskey, is a nonsense. We know that the reasons why local shops close or become run down are many and complex. It is not in the government's ballpark to ensure that we have local shops in our community. It is up to the community itself and it is up to private enterprise. Given that many residents walk to nearby shops in adjacent suburbs, the government does not support that part of Dr Foskey's motion that rejects intense residential redevelopment of core areas in suburbs that lack shops.

In conclusion, the government is committed to supporting the viability of local shops where it can legitimately do so through the planning process. The core area policy, introduced through the garden city provisions, is an excellent example of planning policies that aim to support the continued viability of local shops. However, the

government is not prepared to extend the term of reference relating to the evaluation of the garden city provisions to the territory plan to include a commitment to building and supporting the viability of local shops.

The government agreed to undertake an evaluation of residential policies contained in the garden city provisions. Extending this evaluation to a commitment to building and supporting the viability of local shops would require a comprehensive review of commercial policies applying to local centres. It was never part of the agreed scope of that evaluation.

The government supports the broad thrust of Dr Foskey's motion. However, it does not support adding to the terms of reference for the evaluation of garden city provisions, as outlined in the motion. Whilst the government fully supports a planning regime that strengthens the viability of local shops and schools, this should not be to the extent of direct intervention in the market or taking direct responsibility for such provisions. Thereby I support Mr Corbell's amendment.

DR FOSKEY (Molonglo) (4.29): It has been really interesting to hear the responses of other members of the house. I would like to sum up and respond to Mr Corbell's amendment, which, of course, neatly sidesteps the point of the motion. As Mrs Dunne said, it is another of those amendments where the government looks at itself and says, "What we are doing is good." I will support the amended motion. No doubt it will be amended. That is what happens when the government has a majority in the house. It would be foolish to vote against it.

I would like to respond to speakers in the debate who have, I think, misrepresented the Greens' position. But first I want to speak on the amendment. I am very concerned that the government is not prepared to include some analysis of the impact of changes to the territory plan on local centres. If it is prepared to recognise the vital importance of retail and community services to the social fabric of our suburbs and support a planning regime that strengthens the viability of local shops and schools, which are mentioned in paragraphs (1) and (2) of my motion, you would think that it would be prepared to go a little bit further, which paragraphs (3) and (4) of my motion do.

An approach that simply affirms that the evaluation is about its effectiveness in achieving the outcomes specified in the government's policy absolutely fails to acknowledge the sensitivity and importance to the Canberra community of the issue of local centres. Technically I am sure the government can argue that this direction is a proper one. In dodging the issue underlining this debate, it is nonetheless a rather contemptuous approach. I would remind the minister that in the lead-up to the 2001 election and as recently as mid-2003, when variation 200 came into force, this government claimed a great commitment to community planning processes. Now the government has abandoned both neighbourhood planning and the proposed community planning forums. The new process of conducting so-called consultation through community councils has not been reported on since it was introduced. I would be very interested to hear from the minister how that is going, and I may ask him directly in the next sitting period.

The planning system reform project is designed to deliver a broad-brush approach to zoning and development. But communities want to know the answers to questions and

they are not going to find them in the technical papers that accompanied ACTPLA's planning reform project. For instance, how will reform impact on their local shopping centres? How will it impact on their neighbourhoods? Will they have a say? Those are questions that I do not believe have been addressed yet, but they are the questions that are important to people. I would have thought that a more careful and sympathetic response to these issues and a preparedness to direct the variation 200 review to take these concerns into account would be the least that we could expect.

Mr Corbell indicates that the government has listened to the people of Giralang to the extent that he is asking the developers to provide more than just a corner store. It is very good that the lesson has been learnt from Latham. However, let us go a bit further. What about some public space, a place where people can sit and meet, with coffee shops and a shop where you can buy the necessities of life, the milk, the bread, and so on? We could be a little more proactive there.

I was interested to hear the minister say that the fact that only 10 per cent of retail spending now occurs in local centres is a reason not to support them.

Mr Seselja: Simon, somebody is misrepresenting you. Goodness me!

Mr Corbell: Yes, I know. You do that all the time.

DR FOSKEY: Ten per cent of spending is in local centres. I am not sure why you cited that figure, Mr Corbell, but it is not your turn to speak. All I want to say is that 10 per cent of growing retail expenditure is still quite a lot of money. Who spends that 10 per cent? It is people on their way home from work who like to pull in at the local shopping centre, rather than drive all the way out to the intermediate centres and to the big town centres, which is really quite inconvenient, just to pick up that pint of milk or that frozen dinner. That 10 per cent includes the people who have very small incomes and who may only have access to local shops. They may not have cars. They may have other reasons for needing to use the local centres. I think that 10 per cent is still quite significant.

There is real uncertainty out there in the suburbs. It is a community perception. People might say that the Greens are rumbling on again. But we are representing community fears that shops will be lost. When they see their supermarket close, they get very concerned. They get in touch with us. They probably get in touch with the government, too, even with the opposition.

Mr Seselja said that we really should leave building suburban centres to the private sector. He implied that the Greens said that this was the government's role. No, I have never said that it is a role of government to build and provide suburban centres, although I do think they should provide community facilities in suburban centres. It is the role of our planning regime to shape the way developers build in our suburban centres. Why else do we have a planning system? If we really were going to leave it to the market, we could just get rid of ACTPLA altogether. Clearly, that is not what we want. It is not what I want and I do not think it is what the government wants. I do not think anyone would really like the result, complain all we will about ACTPLA.

Mr Seselja said that we could give up designing suburbs in which people are happy to walk. No, we are not going to be New York here in the ACT. I do not know if that is one of our aspirations. It is not what most people would want. We are going to have to make suburbs in which people will walk. A lot of people cannot afford to drive their cars much any more, so they will have to walk. We do not have public transport that pops from street to street, so they will have to get on shanks's pony and walk. Let us not deny that and let us not put people who cannot drive their cars into the position where it is inconvenient to walk as well.

Yes, it is certainly true that the structure of retail in ACT is a problem. It always has been. The NCDC built ACT suburbs at a time when the car was king. It was never envisaged that we would have to find other ways of getting around. Public transport was always a low priority. Maybe it was a bit much to have local centres as well as intermediate and town centres, but let us really look at that and look at the way that we want our city to be.

If the market says it is right to build houses now and later on it says it is right to revive shopping centres, if we have alienated those areas to houses, we are not going to be able to build those shopping centres that Mrs Dunne was talking about. Florey would not be thriving again as a shopping centre if it had been established as residential dwellings, as is happening in other centres. We have got to make sure that that does not happen and that the market, if we are going to let it rule, really can operate. Yes, we do need to go back to talking to people. The Greens are not sorry about variation 200. I think that Mrs Dunne really misinterpreted the spirit of this motion. Variation 200, especially in retrospect, looks like a very good idea. If there are any problems that people have identified, well, it might need some finetuning.

MR TEMPORARY DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member's time has expired.

MR CORBELL (Molonglo—Minister for Health and Minister for Planning, and Acting Minister for Children, Youth and Family Support, Acting Minister for Women and Acting Minister for Industrial Relations): I seek leave to make an explanation under standing order 47.

Leave granted.

MR CORBELL: In her speech Dr Foskey said that I had used the argument that the proportion of retail expenditure at local centres had fallen from around 20 per cent in the early 1970s to less than 10 per cent today as a reason to abandon local centres. That is not what I said. I said that the level of retail expenditure had fallen from 20 per cent to 10 per cent at local centres and that that was a factor in their viability.

Mr Corbell's amendment agreed to.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Skills shortages and business

MR MULCAHY (Molonglo) (4.41): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) the importance of population growth for strengthening the economy of the ACT;
- (b) the need to overcome the skills shortage in the ACT; and
- (c) the need to identify and overcome negative perceptions of Canberra as a place to live, work and do business; and

(2) calls on the ACT Government to:

- (a) address the skills shortage by drawing on the talents and experience of older people and stepping up migration of skilled and business people;
- (b) create specific advantages in superior infrastructure, clean and plentiful water supply and personal safety;
- (c) improve relationships with the Federal Government to develop special features and facilities which reflect the nation's capital; and
- (d) fulfil its promise to make Canberra "unashamedly pro-business and committed to actions that will make the ACT the premier business friendly location in Australia".

The issue of population growth, skills shortage and business in the ACT is an important one. It ties in with the current debate about the future of Canberra and the perception of our city. I commend the fact that the *Canberra Times* has taken the initiative of focusing on this very important issue.

We all want Canberra to be the best place for living, for business, for recreation and for raising our families. The big question is: how can we make it happen? A key measure of how attractive Canberra is to people is whether they choose to come here and stay here. Regrettably, on that test Canberra is not doing terribly well.

The net population growth in the year to 2004 was only 0.2 per cent, compared with 1.2 per cent nationally. That is, the ACT population is growing at one-third of the national rate. I do not want to be negative about the ACT. It is very easy to be, and there are plenty of people in this country who want to criticise Canberra, but these are alarm bells and these are of concern. We will talk about the amendment later, but it troubles me that there is a reticence to look critically at the issues that I am suggesting we consider today.

The ACT's net population growth to June 2004 was only one-third of what it had been for the previous six years. In looking at some of the individual factors in relation to the make-up of population growth, it is notable to look at overseas migration for the ACT in 2003, which was the latest data I was able to secure. It was only 660 people. Since 1998, net overseas migration has contributed 2,100 people to the ACT population. However, during 2003 the ACT lost a total of 2,600 people to net interstate migration. That was the second largest percentage loss, negative 0.82 per cent, of all states and territories. The ACT has experienced losses from net interstate migration since 2000.

In addition to the low overall population growth, there is a high rate of movement of people into and out of Canberra, the highest in Australia with the exception of the Northern Territory. Indeed, over the five-year period to 2001 the population turnover for the ACT was 62 per cent, indicating that the equivalent of nearly two-thirds of the total population of Canberra in 2001 had moved into or out of Canberra in the previous five years.

Among the reasons that contribute to this factor, of course, are the young age structure of our city, the presence of universities and defence services, our high educational attainment, and the ability of people in this community to find work in the national and international labour market. But the big question is: why do people leave in such large numbers and why is population growth now only one-third of what it was over the past six years? We need to look at what the reasons are and see what we can do about it.

The Treasurer says, in my view quite correctly, that we will grow and develop the ACT economy, city and region, by, to quote from his economic white paper, "being unashamedly pro-business and committed to actions that will make the ACT the premier business friendly location in Australia." The government's economic white paper stresses the "need to diversify the ACT economy to build a strong private sector".

But population growth is important because it strengthens the economy by increasing aggregate demand through consumption of goods and services and through demand for government services and public infrastructure. Population growth also increases the supply of a region's and nation's factors of production, which are capital and labour. It contributes to the region's potential labour supply and contributes to higher living standards by adding value through employment. It frequently adds to savings and access to capital, and potentially adds to the region's stock of knowledge and entrepreneurial skills.

Moreover, it adds to cultural diversity and, in turn, increases the attractiveness of the region to a broader cross-section of people, which is imperative if we are to get more people to move to our city to ensure that our economic future is secure. We need to be thinking outside the square. We need to take lateral views in terms of where we can get people to come to this city. We should engage with the Australian government and tell them that we want more immigration encouraged into this city.

There are talented people in so many countries. I am not necessarily approving of everything the federal government does in this immigration area. I think we are losing opportunities in countries such as Brazil and Argentina and in Eastern Europe, which have had traditionally very high standards of education but very poor income levels,

where we could attract more people to help us with our skill needs. I think Australia has had a reluctance in some of these areas, through our embassies, to show an enthusiasm to bring people in from these parts of the world.

On the weekend, I had a call from a friend in Brazil who told me that Australia was actively encouraging people to come here and study. That is a great thing, and it is a very profitable business. But I think we have to be a little more serious and go further than simply saying, "Bring your wallet." We need to tap into the educated people in some of these developing countries and try to get them into our country, and Canberra needs to have its hand up high and say, "Look after Canberra. Let us develop this city. We have the educational skills, we have the capacity to grow and we want our fair share of the pie." I encourage the government to take a more visible role in immigration policy and put that plea to the commonwealth, because I think we need to find new sources of labour and people with skills to ensure our businesses have a bright future and do not move into the larger population market so that they can continue to expand.

One of the main factors limiting business and economic growth in Canberra is clearly the shortage of skilled people. Speakers at the recent business summit entitled "Beyond the Canberra plan" highlighted skills shortages as the most important issue of the time. The causes of the skills shortage identified at the business summit were varied, but they included the loss of highly educated young people because, in their words—not necessarily ones I immediately agree with—they believe that many young people see our city as dull. Some felt there were not the opportunities here. There was also a belief that the government is not a pro-business type of government. That is a view that I hear expressed in many other parts of Australia when people reflect on the image that we have in the ACT. As we have discussed in the context of the trees debate, it is a government that seems very keen to regulate to extremes.

Speakers at that summit said that the perception that the territory government is not friendly to business had been compounded by different legislation brought in by the government. Examples were cited in a number of areas. The industrial manslaughter legislation was cited as one of the negative legislative examples. I know that Mr Corbell just dismissed all that today and said that it is not an issue, but it is an issue and it is an issue of concern when the territory government feels that it is a populist role to go down the road of targeting people such as company directors without looking at the entire equation as to what contributes to these situations.

It was seen as symptomatic of an anti-business attitude, despite being portrayed by the government as a supposedly positive step. Remedies for negligent employers were already in place and the need for more draconian laws aimed at directors had never been demonstrated. Labor's obsession with portability of long service leave does nothing to promote Canberra as a forward thinking and economically responsible jurisdiction. It gives the impression that we are captives in this city of a segment of the trade union movement.

Some speakers at the conference said that, if we are to attract businesses to Canberra and to retain our existing enterprises, modifications to payroll tax—and I say modifications, not abolition, as the Chief Minister tried to claim and tried to spin, because he does like to verbal—and stamp duties on business need examination. Rather than slavishly following New South Wales, we should set ourselves apart from other states and

territories. Tax reform, such as in relation to stamp duties on commercial leases, should be seriously examined, and not just disregarded because the larger Labor states tell us that that is the party line to which we must adhere.

That is what happened. I saw the letter that was signed by our Treasurer and a group of others. They said, "We are not even going to talk about it." Just because that is the decision of those up the road in Sydney, why should they be dictating things to Canberra? The same people who said, "This is the way you boys will follow the line" turned around and said, "And people in Canberra are getting way too much GST. Let's rip some of that back because we need to prop up the mismanagement of the New South Wales Labor government."

We should take an approach whereby we seize opportunity rather than being dragged down the road of following every other state. I have said in this house before that the Queensland Labor government, to give credit where credit is due, is not as willing simply to acquiesce with all these instructions from the Labor mates. They know that they can seize an opportunity by going out and running their own race, and that state's economy has prospered because of the entrepreneurial attitude that was prevalent under the last regime and, in fact, much of the same approach to doing business applies to this regime. They know that attracting business is a competitive business.

The low unemployment rate in the ACT and the rest of Australia is making it more difficult than in the past to recruit new workers, especially ones with skills. Employers must therefore look outside the square to seek opportunities for recruitment. For example, there are many people in Canberra who have taken early retirement because of counterproductive incentives in their superannuation entitlements. Often they are people who are talented and experienced and who have skills that would be of great value to a broad range of employers.

A change to taxation and superannuation arrangements is needed so that older people have an incentive to remain in the work force if they choose. I would urge the Treasurer and the ACT government to join with their state colleagues in encouraging such changes at the federal level, not simply to fight with Canberra. The current public service superannuation arrangements significantly disadvantage people who, under the old scheme, do not get out by the time they are aged 55 or, under the new scheme, by the time they are aged 60.

There are some employers showing initiative in this area. I think in particular of the ANZ Bank, which announced this week that older employees were going to be welcome and were going to be taken on and encouraged to continue working in their organisation. I am not necessarily an advocate of the banks as the champions of good management practice, but I believe the ANZ Bank showed great thinking in demonstrating that they are willing to look outside the square and encourage older workers to stay on. They indicated that six per cent of their 18,000 employees were aged over 55 and recognise that retaining older employees will have several advantages. As the demographics are changing in Canberra and in Australia, we need to start to realise that we have a significant resource that we are losing because of the way in which our superannuation and tax arrangements have been structured. The ACT could be innovative in encouraging a new approach.

Migration, as I have said, is a critical source of skilled labour for the ACT. The Treasurer, no doubt, will get up and talk about the government's business migration scheme, but we need to look beyond the business migration scheme. Around the world, governments are seeing migration as an effective means of increasing the skill levels of the work force generally, of addressing specific skills shortages that might be impeding economic growth and of countering the effects of having an ageing population.

The ACT must become innovative to compete with other attractive locations for the best skilled migrants. We need to get the message out there that this is a good place to operate and a good place to live. We are behind the eight ball repeatedly in terms of international tourism because we are simply not well known and Canberra is not recognised as a place that people would particularly want to go to. We all know, those of us who live here, that the city has many inherent qualities, but it is important, firstly, that the territory is managed sensibly and, secondly, that we make it popular and appealing to younger people to try life in this city.

In the remaining time I have, I would just draw attention to a city that has taken a far more proactive view than the ACT government. I refer to what has been done in Adelaide. There are action plans for trying to encourage young people into that city. Dr Foskey will be delighted to hear about the affordable rental housing program there, the online rent and youth accommodation register, the strengthening of the city's work force with the city youth traineeship scheme, and the city young employer of the year award.

A host of other things are taking place, such as the early sessions scheme, Adelaide City Council's plan to encourage city workers to stay on and attract young people to the city between the hours of 5.00 and 8.00 pm on weekdays during the months of November to March. The social side of the city is something that Adelaide realises is an important factor in getting young people to enjoy life there and to settle in those communities and therefore provide a valuable work force, an economic force, for the community. The gap year initiative there is another thing that we ought to be looking at in the territory. It encourages people to come to that city, backpackers and students, taking a year off from formal education to be attracted to South Australia and enjoy the benefits of that community.

There is so much that this territory government should be doing, with a bit of imagination, to promote the qualities of our city, to enhance the operating environment for business and to ensure that the future economic position of the ACT is well secured. I know that Mr Quinlan will move an amendment that really just pats him on the back and says that the government is doing a wonderful job. We will not improve things in Canberra, we will not address that need for growth in our population if we sit back on our laurels and simply say that we are doing a wonderful job here and we cannot do any better.

We heard earlier today the notion that you must stop the process of reform and improvement: "Don't change the industrial system because we are happy with where it is." In fact, Australia is prospering because we are having far-reaching economic reform and Canberra as a city, the ACT as a jurisdiction, has to embrace the same philosophical view.

MR QUINLAN (Molonglo—Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development and Business, Minister for Tourism, Minister for Sport and Recreation, and Minister for Racing and Gaming) (4.56): As I read this motion, I was wondering what it was really about. Mr Mulcahy is now the shadow minister for economic development, with a wide-ranging motion on population, skills shortages, older people, skills migration, negative perceptions of Canberra, water supply, personal safety, federal-state relations, facilities in the national capital and business support. It sounded to me like one of those speeches of a future leader. Is this the Mulcahy manifesto?

For Mr Smyth's benefit, as he returns to the house, I just want to make a point in clarification while we are taking our little shots at him over the leadership wrangle. I heard Mr Smyth ascribe the rumours to Mr Hargreaves. Mr Smyth, I have news for you: the rumours started at Mr Mulcahy's fundraisers before the election.

Mr Mulcahy: Which one?

MR QUINLAN: The one where you were telling people what you were going to do after you were elected; that one. Maybe there was more than one, but at least one. If you have not heard it, Mr Smyth, some people who pretend to support you obviously do not, if you have not been similarly advised.

Mr Mulcahy referred to the discussions earlier about all the super-duper reforms that have taken place under the present government. As I listened to some of the discussions, I was waiting to hear it said that it was Malcolm Fraser or John Howard who had opened relations with China and I was waiting to hear it said that it was Peter Costello who had floated the Australian dollar or broken down tariff barriers. China is the major driver of the buoyant economy around the world at this particular stage and is certainly a major trading partner of Australia. I was expecting to hear history rewritten to that point, but I think we have stopped just a little short of that. Somehow, whatever has happened since some major reforms in this economy and in the world economy are all attributable to the Howard government and reforms and prosperity in the ACT are, of course, attributed to the underpinning of the previous government. It just depends on where you are at the time, doesn't it?

In relation to some of the things that Mr Mulcahy said and the discussion that he referred to where the ACT government was referred to as not being pro-business, that is not what the surveys have shown. I say it with trepidation because business confidence sampling is so very volatile, but the surveys that I have seen over the past year or two would say the opposite; that if there is any indication, they are saying that the ACT is a good place in which to do business. So, if you are going to pin and base your argument on that foundation, the whole argument fails.

There has been a repetition by some of things that the ACT government has done in terms of its industrial relations law, particularly in terms of industrial manslaughter, which, I might say, is good legislation with a bad title. My department ran seminars for businesses on the industrial manslaughter law and they said, "Is that it? Is it just about removing the corporate veil? Is that what it is about?" Yes, that is what it is about. That is not what is being sold by those who are against it. But those people who attended

seminars and went through the legislation said that their fears had been allayed. It does not matter that, because it could be played upon, it has been played upon.

The surveys do not bear out the claims that Mr Mulcahy has made. They may do one day. If interest rates change, if the petrol crisis impacts upon the economy, business confidence will fall. We know that. It is a volatile thing. You will find that when you scratch people, you do surveys, you get the simple answers from time to time about government red tape, regulation or something, but, overall, the surveys of the last couple of years contradict what you are saying.

We have had a low population growth. It is something that we still wrestle with. We find it difficult to reconcile the fact that we have increased participation in the labour force, we have had several years of buoyant house sales and, as discussed earlier, we have a very tight rental market, yet officially our population has not grown. That is odd and we will pursue it to reconcile the numbers that do not add up in terms of the economy. That is the situation within the borders. If we look at the situation around Canberra, what I would like to call greater Canberra, we will find that greater Canberra has a higher growth rate.

If you look at the economic white paper—not just to find negatives in it but if you actually look at it—you will see that it immediately discusses the fact that the ACT economy is actually a regional economy and we do work within the region. We have seen growth in and around Canberra. We have seen growth in employment. We have certainly seen growth in the economy.

As Mr Corbell rightly pointed out, we have a few cranes in the sky, and it is always very nice for a government to be able to point to cranes in the sky. Those cranes in the sky in large part have had to do with the government. It is the government that is working with the ANU and building that precinct on the periphery of the campus. We have done that. It is the government—

Mrs Dunne: There aren't any cranes there.

MR QUINLAN: There will be student residences over there and there will be more.

Mr Smyth: There are no cranes.

MR QUINLAN: I look forward to there being more cranes in the sky, which will be even better. By the end of the year, we will have the NICTA building coming out of the ground.

Mr Smyth: It has only taken three years.

MR QUINLAN: Of course it has. It has taken longer than we would have liked, but—

Mr Smyth: Even you got rejected by your planning laws.

MR QUINLAN: I do not think it was our planning laws, Mr Smyth.

Mr Smyth: It was. The DA got rejected three times.

MR QUINLAN: The DA got changed. If I might allow myself to be diverted, you will get from time to time developers saying that the planning laws held them up for 18 months. The mere fact that they tried to push the envelope every time they went back to the planning authority and wanted to add a bit here and a bit there and had to go back again because they were told that they could not do it does not count; it took 18 months. How often have we seen developments where there have been changes along the way? It is always the case that you will see the government and planning orders getting the blame, but it is not always the planning laws that ought to be blamed for it. It is not the case—

Mr Smyth: George Wasson said that it was the planning laws.

Ms MacDonald: Are you friends again with George? You weren't friends with him earlier today.

Mr Smyth: I have always been friends with George.

MR TEMPORARY DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order, members! Mr Quinlan has the floor.

MR QUINLAN: It is very hard to keep one's temper in this place. I will allow myself to be diverted again. Question time has turned into a gigglefest. Mr Smyth, you do not deserve to be leader over there. You behave like a schoolboy, you on one end and Pratt on the other. You should wear short pants, quite frankly.

Mr Smyth: Summer is coming. I will wear my shorts in summer.

MR QUINLAN: That will suit you, mate. Going back to the point, I think that much of what Mr Mulcahy has said and much of what he has based his argument on is actually turning the facts over. If it is not the case that the world at large thinks the ACT government is anti-business, a lot of what you said is arrant nonsense. As to what the government might do, the government has resurrected its skilled migration program. We have at today's count about 80 applicants. We will be involved in expos in Dublin and London shortly. We have had meetings with the German ambassador in recent days. There is genuine interest in skilled migration to the ACT.

But it is not as simple as you are going to want to paint it, that we just put up a sign and in they will come. We have difficulties with the commonwealth in as much as they will not define the ACT as a region, so there are higher standards and requirements for skilled migration to Canberra. We are considered the same as the large metropolitan areas, whereas other major cities in Australia have regional status and the rules are relaxed. We are trying to work with the commonwealth to get ourselves defined as a region so that we can attract more people.

We have invested additional funds in VET. We have invested in the building of an innovative economy. Before we came to government, the exercises in business incentives were just a catalogue of disasters. They were flirtations with major nationals. You got stung; you got taken. There were some very dopey deals done and I would suggest that if the Liberals were in power right now we would still be doing the dopey deals under Mr Smyth.

We have taken a strategic approach and that strategic approach is bearing fruit. That is going to build a solid foundation. We are not immediately going to have Fujitsu here and be the second centre of Fujitsu for the world or something. We got done, didn't we? We were going to have a large Ansett call centre. We got done, didn't we? This government is working on building a solid economy. It is not working on building the flashy oncers that were the hallmark of the Carnell government.

We will look at the initiatives Adelaide is trying to take. They went around once before with not a great deal of success and we do not need to be doing what they are doing if it does not work. If their package has become more sophisticated, we will look at what they do and we will look at what people do in other centres around the world to try to build, but I know from what I have studied that if you want to build you have to build solidly, you have to build strategically.

Today, I did an interview with a biotechnology magazine on the venture capital fund into which we put \$10 million and which will now be \$30 million because of the MTAA. We will have there within the city at least \$30 million as a venture capital fund to build on the initiatives that we are promoting through knowledge bank, through our association with the university, through doing sensible things to build the economy and not putting on a show which generally does not amount to anything at the end of the day and which, I am afraid, if that lot got in we would be returning to. Mr Speaker, I move the following amendment:

Omit paragraph (2), substitute:

“(2) recognises the ACT Government's efforts to:

- (a) address the skills shortage in partnership with the business community;
- (b) create new and attractive infrastructure, such as City West, in partnership with the ANU and the wider business community; and
- (c) make Canberra the most small business friendly jurisdiction in Australia.”.

DR FOSKEY (Molonglo) (5.11): I will not be supporting Mr Mulcahy's motion today, as I believe it is based on a number of misconceptions. Similarly, I will not be supporting Mr Quinlan's amendments, as they do not question Mr Mulcahy's assumptions. The Greens measure the wellbeing of a city by more than the number of cranes on the skyline. The first misconception in Mr Mulcahy's motion is that population growth equals economic growth. Population growth does not automatically result in economic growth, nor is it necessary for economic growth. For the first, let us look at India, where population growth has not resulted in economic growth; nor is it necessary for economic growth.

Some of the most prosperous countries are places with relatively small and stable populations. Look at Europe, for instance. At last year's Symposium on Population and Economic Prosperity, Chris Richardson, from Access Economics, said that participation and productivity are more important than population growth. He went on to argue that the ACT already has high participation and productivity, with the potential to build on those strengths.

Mr Mulcahy might have accepted without question the common assumption that we must have growth in sectors of industry in order to ensure that they reach an economy of scale. This is an argument that may be true when you are talking about traditional industry sectors such as manufacturing, which have substantial infrastructure needs, but here in the ACT our local economy has an extraordinarily high concentration of intellect-based, creative and educational industries. It is perhaps the local economy in Australia least dependent on economies of scale. There are no vehicle factories in the ACT.

The second misconception is that economic growth equals improvements in the quality of life of citizens. One of the most common mistakes of the growth argument is that economic expansion is in itself beneficial. In fact, improving the average income of residents is a more meaningful, if still flawed, primary objective. Thus the focus should be on per capita growth, not the overall level of growth. While higher population growth would undoubtedly result in higher growth in total income, it is hard to argue that a faster rate of population growth would result in a faster rate of per capita income growth. Even if the new residents have higher than average skill levels, the additional income growth would accrue to those workers rather than to existing residents.

I question whose interests Mr Mulcahy is representing here. Indeed, the only people guaranteed to benefit from population growth are those engaged in the building and development industry. There is no doubt that the building industry benefits when it can cover more paddocks with roads, houses and shopping centres, but there is no limit to this. The building industry will keep making the argument no matter how much the city expands. A city with a stable population could continue to support a building industry, but it would be smaller and would concentrate on improving the quality of existing structures. It would be focused on enriching the existing built environment, rather than on increasing the sprawl.

An ORIMA Research survey shows that the bulk of Canberrans do not regard the endless spread of the city as a benefit. Indeed the survey found that almost three-quarters of Canberrans believe that the city's population should be no bigger than it is now. I am not saying they are right, I am just expressing the opinion of many people in Canberra. Respondents were asked if they believed that the quality of life would be harmed if Canberra's population reached 500,000 or more, as advocated by some business groups and predicted by the government in the Canberra spatial plan. The majority—or 59 per cent—believe that the quality of life would be harmed. Older residents, women and households with incomes of less than \$50,000 were more likely to believe that the quality of life would deteriorate if the population were substantially larger. Is Mr Mulcahy representing his constituents, is he representing the development lobby, or are they the same?

I believe the development lobby has had too much influence on Canberra's planning, and here is further evidence of it. Although I reject the assumption that population growth will automatically lead to a better quality of life for ACT residents, this does not mean I am automatically against growth. I am willing to be convinced that there are benefits in modest population growth, but this must be based on evidence of real benefits rather than broad assumptions. We do not need to have population growth just for the sake of it. If we do pursue growth, we need to be careful about the ecological footprint. We need to be

mindful of the environmental impact and work to ensure that the city is environmentally sustainable. We also need to be mindful of the social impact with regard to housing affordability and quality of life for those living on the margins of the city.

The third misconception in Mr Mulcahy's motion is that we need to import skilled workers to address the skills shortage. There have been warning signs of an increasing skills shortage for at least a decade. Governments at all levels have been urged to invest in training and education as a primary strategy, and to address issues in some growth sectors, such as community services, by improving wages, conditions and status. It is the failure of successive governments to take this advice and adopt a long-term view that has contributed to the problems we are experiencing now. We cannot afford to let this continue. It is time for immediate action to begin to address the skills shortage, but I am not convinced that skilled migration is the best solution.

I concur with Professor Sue Richardson from the National Institute of Labour Studies at Flinders University, who argues that simply boosting migrant numbers is a lazy approach. She instead suggests that employers have to take a longer-term perspective on the way they manage their work forces and the whole development towards what she calls "just in time labour", where employees are engaged on a casual, part-time or contract basis and kept on for as long as it suits the employer. Once it no longer suits, these employees are fired. This is not conducive to an environment of mutual skills development by workers and their employers. There is much employers could do to change this approach and take a more holistic approach towards building a skilled and stable work force.

Professor Richardson and others have also argued that we have a great reservoir of skilled workers in our older workers, which is largely untapped by employers. The rate of retirement of older people—and I am now talking 55 to 65, which I do not think is very old—has been rising rapidly. These people have many skills but they are not attracted to a work force that requires them to work a 50-hour week under intense pressure. Other groups too are choosing not to work long hours in stressful positions, including people with children or caring responsibilities. We could do a lot to provide better support to these groups and create more flexible workplaces, to allow people to continue to develop skills, build a career and maintain a work/life balance.

Before we focus on attracting more skilled people to Canberra we should also ask what we can do to help the unemployed and underemployed to develop the skills we need and take their places in the work force in meaningful roles. Like other jurisdictions, there are subgroups of people in the ACT who have missed out on the benefits of economic growth and falling unemployment.

Creating positive perceptions: the one part of Mr Mulcahy's motion I can wholly agree with is that it is important to overcome negative perceptions of Canberra as a place to work, live and do business. I think most of us feel very lucky to live in Canberra. Many of us have made a decision to live here because we know that we have benefits we would not have elsewhere. I think it is a shame, then, that negative perceptions tend to persist. It is important for us to promote more positive images. One way we might do this is by creating a socially and environmentally sustainable city that sets a new benchmark for Australian cities and gives our residents a reason to feel pride in this place.

I also agree that we should look at other jurisdictions for ideas. Let us look beyond the other capital cities in this country to towns of comparable size, such as Geelong and Ballarat in Victoria; and Wagga and Armidale in New South Wales, for we are an odd mix between city and regional centre. We are unique in being the national capital and a city-state, which opens up special opportunities that I believe we could capitalise on a great deal more. To end my speech, there are many ways of looking at Canberra and looking at what contributes to success. No doubt we will have this debate over and over again but, on the whole, I find very little difference between Mr Quinlan's approach and Mr Mulcahy's approach. I think they both leave out far too much about what is important for Canberra.

MR SMYTH (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (5.21): Mr Speaker, the opposition will not be agreeing to Mr Quinlan's amendment because it is not worthy of support. I want to start where Mr Quinlan finished. He was talking about looking at the recent business surveys. Let us look at a couple of those. The July ACT and Region Chamber of Commerce and Industry business expectations survey pointed to a weaker performance in a number of categories. I will read from the recorded ABC news story. It says:

The Chamber of Commerce's latest survey of business expectations shows profits and employment are flat for the first time in years.

The ACT has enjoyed a booming economy for the past nine years but in the last quarter that growth has flattened.

Profits are down, as is employment, with the Territory experiencing a shortage of skilled workers.

The long-term forecast for capital growth is also down.

Not so rosy! At the same time—in August—we had the Sensis survey. Again I will read the headline from an ABC story. It says:

A survey released today says the ACT small business sector is lagging behind the national average in several key performance areas.

There was good and bad in both those surveys, but they show that the gloss is off. The gloss is off because of the inaction of this government and, in particular, the inaction of this minister. It is interesting that there is this sudden pointing to the cranes on the skyline. According to the Treasurer, the cranes are all there because of his action. He refutes the claim that it is the planning laws that are stopping things from occurring. It was not. We have said it.

Let us go to somebody who is not normally aligned with the Liberal Party. George Wasson said he had \$350 million to invest in a super fund that he helps control, but that he would not be investing in Canberra because it is just too hard. That is a slightly different view than that which the Treasurer was pointing to. Then the Treasurer put forward the notion that we got skun on some of our business programs. Some of them certainly did not work as well as they could have, but you have to look at the net overall effect. The net overall effect of us looking at bringing companies relating to IT to the territory was that the St George *Trends* magazine, when it did a survey of IT, called the

ACT the IT capital of Australia. That was a consequence of the work of the previous government. We had double the national average of people involved in IT. Why? Because of the work of the previous government.

He then went on to talk about biotech. If I remember back to 1999, the federal government put up about \$10 million worth of biotech investment money. We, the then ACT government, together with the ANU, the CSIRO and a number of other partners, put together a consortium that picked up about 60 per cent of that money. They formed a little thing called Epicorp that was commercialising biotech industry in the ACT long before you found it, Treasurer. It was actually here in the ACT because we talked to the federal government; we put together the bid; we got the money; and we started the industry. I think you need to go back and get your facts straight, because rewriting history can come back to bite you.

What Mr Mulcahy is trying to get at here—and he made a good point—was that you cannot afford to sit tight. What we saw reflected in the motion this morning was: things are okay, so do not change anything; if we sit tight, the wolves will wander past the door; they will not come in. But you cannot afford to sit tight. You cannot afford to run the Chicken Little school of politics that says, “The sky will fall.” Look at the achievement of any federal government in relation to growth—growth in wages, growth in income for households, growth in employment and growth in real wages. The current federal government has overdelivered on each of those. It has also overdelivered, in comparison to the previous Labor government, on what has been done for Canberra.

Let us look at the last budget. The last budget put \$54 million into a national portrait gallery—vital infrastructure for the future. Mr Mulcahy talks about us having superior infrastructure. It has put \$40 million into the refurb of the mint; it is going to build a new public service building at Russell; it is going to build a federation guard headquarters at Duntroon, and so on. Here is the commitment of the federal Liberal government to Canberra, but we do not see that view from this government. This government has missed the opportunity. Even the *Canberra Times*, in an editorial, said that some of these budgets were budgets of lost opportunity.

The ABS has recently put out some predictions. Their low prediction says that, by 2030, the ACT population will actually have gone backwards. If you take a medium route it says that, by about 2030, the population of the ACT will be up to about 380,000. If you want to take the high forecast it will be up to about 452,000. That is not going to happen unless we have a plan to make it happen and, as Mr Mulcahy points out so well in (2) (b), unless we create specific advances in superior infrastructure and maintain that infrastructure for a clean and plentiful water supply. That will become the limiting sum on all growth in Australia. We must look at things like personal safety, which is something that has been ignored by this government.

Point (c) says that we should improve relationships with the federal government to develop special features and facilities that reflect the nation’s capital. The national government—the federal government, the commonwealth government—is doing its bit: what is this lot doing? They sit here day after day bagging all the initiatives of a government that has overdelivered for the last nine years. I think it shows that we are still fighting the ideological cold war that these people enjoy so much when they have nothing else to say. We need to look at the numbers. Let us take the ABS middle

prediction, the in-between prediction, that by 2030 we will have about 381,000 people. Of those, 80,700 will be under the under the age of 19; 181,000 people will be aged 20 to 54; 42,700 people will be in the 55 to 64 bracket and 75,700 will be aged 65 and over.

How do we respond to these figures? What do they say to us and what do they say about the planning we need to do? Let us look at this. If we take this as the middle path—and it is by no means a strong middle path—the number of school-age children in the ACT will fall by another 7,000. The number of people in the broad working age—say 20 to mid-50s—will increase by only 4,700. The number of people who may be interested in part-time work, or who will retire, goes up by about 7,000. The number of older and aged people in our community skyrockets by more than 43,000, from 32,600 to 75,700.

Ageing is a good thing but the problem for us is whether we will have the infrastructure and indeed the workers that Mr Mulcahy talks about in part (2) (a) to service the aged care community. I am told there are currently about 2,000 aged care workers for the 32,000 aged Canberrans we have. When it goes up to 75,700, how many more aged care workers will we need just to cover the aged care population? There is a question: how many more will we need? If it is 2,000 at the moment, when you take it that the number of people over 75 and 85 will triple and quadruple and that of those 40 per cent will need aged care facilities, you are talking about an increase in the number of those of broad working age of 4,700 being absorbed almost entirely in providing for aged care. What happens to the rest of the economy? Absolutely nothing, it fails to grow. If it is not growing, then it is not returning to the government the money it needs to provide the aged care services. That is why Mr Mulcahy has put this motion on the notice paper. Part (1) (a) talks about the importance of population growth for strengthening the economy of the ACT.

The material Dr Foskey put before the Assembly—that it is okay as it is and it will be all right because we will cope somehow—is just ridiculous. In the late 1970s, inner Canberra had 88,000 residents. Although by the end of the 1980s the number of residents had dropped to about 59,000, we still had to maintain the infrastructure; we still had to support the same number of shops; we still had to keep the churches open and have members for the scout troop. It has come back a little with the infill process we started in respect of densification. When last I heard—at the end of the 1990s—it was about 63,000. I assume it is a bit higher now.

The problem is that we have infrastructure that was built for probably a third more. That means that either we all end up paying a third more in taxes or we reduce the services. Nobody wants to see service levels reduced in the ACT; we are very proud of where we live and how we live. That is why this motion is important. It should not be belittled by changing it to “recognises the ACT government’s efforts to address these things”. I think there is goodwill on both sides to make this work. The motion should stand as it is. What we should do is fulfil the promise the government made to make it unashamedly pro small business, because that is the future for the ACT.

MR SPEAKER: The member’s time has expired.

MRS DUNNE (Ginninderra) (5.31): I have to commend Mr Mulcahy for bringing forward this important matter which, of course, is inconveniently uncomfortable for the Treasurer, so he has to deride it. The economic growth of our territory is a most

important issue. Part of our economic growth is contingent upon continued population growth. Mr Smyth has pointed to figures that indicate that without population growth our economy will slow.

It was interesting to hear Dr Foskey's exposition on population growth and economic growth as they relate to countries in Europe. I do not think we need to look very closely into the economies of places like Italy, which has a population growth below replacement rate; or Spain, which has a population growth even lower than Italy's and huge environmental problems without the economy to deal with them; or Germany. In many cases Germany is living on old money and has huge economic problems in front of it. I do not think we have a great deal to learn from the old economies of Western Europe. And I do not think we have much to learn from Green economic policy, which can only be described as Luddite economic policy.

At a seminar recently on water policy, I was reminded of the old adage, "You cannot be green if you are in the red." We do want to create a sustainable environment in the ACT. Unless we have sufficient economic growth to do so, we will not be doing it and our standard of living, our social and physical amenity will decline. Dr Foskey said that no-one benefits from increased population growth except the building industry. I can think of a fair few video shop owners, restaurateurs, hoteliers and contract cleaners. Just about any aspect of the economy will benefit by population growth. The mere fact that there are more people in the city requiring goods and services will do that for us. The anti-population growth aspirations of the Greens are best described by the sort of naturalistic romanticism favoured by Rousseau, which usually ends up in totalitarianism and ignores the reality of how people live, work, and aspire to improve themselves.

In discussing population growth and its relationship to employment generally and skills shortages in particular, it is crucial to appreciate the complexity of the various issues involved. I do not think anyone here today is saying there is an easy fix; there is no silver bullet. Mr Mulcahy's motion today is about starting that discussion, rather than the Treasurer sitting there snidely saying that we are turning things on their backs and that this is about a leadership challenge. It is not about that, it is about the future of the ACT. If he does not care about it, that is fine. He can make those snide comments all he likes, but all they do is tell the community that he does not care about the future of the economy and employment growth in this town. It is an exceedingly complex issue riddled with errors. There are three main errors I would like to deal with.

There is a lot of what I would call moral panic, which usually leads to inappropriate, if not self-defeating and short-term, expedience. We tend to go in for scapegoating, or we attempt to allocate blame to our favourite bogeyman. In the case of this government it is the commonwealth government for doing terrible things about industrial relations when, in reality, many groups and organisations are responsible for whatever difficulties we have to face now. We need to face up to the fact that we all have a part to play. This also leads to misleading concepts and statistics, which give a false sense of objective empirical evidence of what is, in reality, nothing more than special pleading. I would like to look at those things in more detail: firstly, moral panic, which leads to short-term, self-defeating expedience.

The most obvious example at present is our alarm about skills shortage, which has given rise to numerous panicky solutions to address what might be only a short-term problem.

Skills shortage in itself is a problem but it can be a sign of many things. It can be a sign of a booming economy. As the ANU's Professor Bob Gregory has argued, there is every reason to welcome, in some sense, a skills shortage if it leads to the hiring and training of people, especially young people, who would otherwise remain on welfare or as part of the unskilled working poor.

If we have a skills shortage, we should be looking immediately at the people within our own jurisdiction who can benefit from it. Older people also have a great many skills. Until recently, most of those have been cast aside when they reach unfashionable ages. A skills shortage is a way of reintegrating older people into the work force and taking advantage of their skills, expertise and long experience. There are other things we need to look at, of course. One is the issue that a skills shortage may also be a sign of bad planning, especially in education and training, not only of government policy—although that is central—but also policy in the private sector.

There is the second error of scapegoating. Employers today complain that they do not have enough skilled tradesmen but, over the past 20 years, training rates in the metals, building, construction, vehicle and electrical trades have declined by some 16 per cent, and this in the face of warnings from employer groups that investment in training was being badly neglected. Instead there has been a tendency to poach, to outsource, to believe blindly in new technology and to rely on casual or short-term appointments. It is all part of the increasing tendency, in some areas, to pay by the hour, assess your profitability by the quarter and not look to the long term. Only yesterday the Prime Minister spoke about impediments to training wages in many awards that make it difficult for people to get into those industries. The fact is that all major stakeholders—governments, employers and unions—have connived in creating the skills shortage. They now need to collaborate in doing something about it not by short-term panic measures, but through rational medium and long-term strategies.

Then there are statistics. The clearest example here is unemployment statistics. Employment formally begins if you work for one hour a week. Sometimes you can be formally employed if you only work for one hour and do not get paid for it. There are a lot of people to be blamed for this. This is, of course, an ABS definition but it is also taken from the International Labour Organisation—that much-vaunted organisation of the left.

We need to be cognisant of other gauges of joblessness. This includes people who cannot find sufficient work to meet all their economic needs and who want to obtain more. According to Mr Fred Argy, using this definition, the definition of the national employment rate could jump to as much as nine per cent. Conversely, Mr Argy contends that the number of jobless who are classically unemployed is some 150,000, compared to 900,000 who are probably underemployed.

There is much we can do. The most important thing we can do in the short term is reintegrate older workers into the mainstream economy, while bringing unskilled younger people into employment for the first time. The former is obvious; it is the most effective short-term expedient; but the latter is not some sort of distant goal. At the moment there are people who are underemployed or unemployed because they are unskilled. A lot of skills are not difficult to obtain. The recent ABS figures on jobs growth show that the largest areas of increase are 9.5 per cent for advanced clerical and

sales services and 6.2 per cent in low-skilled clerical and sales services. These are areas of low skill where we can bring people into the economy quickly.

As Mr Mulcahy has said, we need to concentrate on skilled migration and business migration, which has been a significant failure of this government over the past four years. I heard the Deputy Chief Minister on the radio the other day bemoaning the fact that he could not get immigration to do particular things that would make things easier. We should make things easier. Instead of bemoaning the fact and standing up here on a regular basis and bucketing the federal government, why don't you get down and be comprehensively cooperative about the process?

MS MacDONALD (Brindabella) (5.42): This motion addresses some of the biggest challenges facing the ACT at this time: population, skills and possible negative perceptions of Canberra as a place to live, work and do business. The ACT government is committed to overcoming any skills shortages in the ACT; however, it is important to note that skills shortages occur in complex social, economic, demographic and political environments. The term itself is broad, vague and non-specific.

The opposition likes to use this catchphrase often when discussing industrial relations and the ACT economy. This is a diversionary tactic to take attention away from the fact that the ACT enjoys such a low level of unemployment. In the general community, "skills shortage" is a catch-all for a complex set of employment-related challenges that include skills gaps, labour shortages and recruitment difficulties. Mr Quinlan has spoken about some of the achievements of the government in these areas and some of the major initiatives currently under way. I would like to add to this by focusing on three other areas, if I have the time. They are vocational education and training, mature age employment and the image of Canberra.

Turning first to vocational education and training, the training and adult education area of the Department of Education and Training has recently released the July 2005 edition of the *Vocational Education and Training Half-Yearly Outlook*. This publication includes an indicative list of skills shortage areas that the ACT government will be addressing through the allocation of vocational education and training funding.

The ACT government continues to provide an effective and efficient vocational education and training system, with high participation rates and sound outcomes for students, industry and the community. We have a strong commitment to sustain participation in vocational education and training as a means of providing appropriately qualified and trained citizens to contribute to the economic, social and cultural wellbeing of the ACT. In fact, the ACT vocational education and training system produces better outcomes than most of the rest of Australia. The level of qualifications is higher than the national average and load pass rates for all students and for students in equity groups are higher than the national average.

The National Centre for Vocational Education Research has recently released statistics which show that numbers in training in the ACT remain at record levels—above 6,000 trainees and apprentices. The ACT training system has been brought into a soft landing after the peak of 2003-04, thanks to sustained commitment by the ACT government. The ACT government will ensure this effort is maintained. That peak saw that, in the

12 months to December 2003, commencements of apprenticeships and traineeships in the ACT increased by more than six times the national rate.

In September 2003 the number of apprentices and trainees in training in the ACT was 34 per cent higher than a year earlier. Over the past three years, numbers in traditional trades in the ACT have increased to meet the growing demand. Some examples include plumbing, which nearly doubled, from 40 to 70 commencements; bricklaying, which increased from 14 to 29—more than double—electrotechnology in refrigeration and air-conditioning, which went from 16 to 24 commencements; electrotechnology for systems electricians, which went from 65 to 81 commencements, and hospitality operations, which went from two to 40 commencements. The graduates of that peak will soon be entering the Canberra market, addressing, at least to an extent, the skills shortage to which Mr Mulcahy has referred.

As far as funding for all this training activity is concerned, this government continues to look at the best way to maintain this momentum. The ACT increased its training budget for 2004-05 by \$2 million at the beginning of the year. Meeting the growth and demand for apprenticeships and traineeships required another injection of \$3.1 million in the second appropriation. Maintaining these trends also includes regular consultation with industry to ensure that government is in tune with their needs. Every six months the department does a scan of the ACT environment, producing a systemic, logical collection of the latest intelligence on skills shortages from industry itself.

Through this process we ensure that we have a sound information base through which to develop policies to address skills shortages. For example, shortages of bricklayers, plasterers and tilers, exacerbated by high levels nationally of housing activity, are being addressed by substantial financial incentives through the building and construction industry training levy fund. This encourages employers to take on apprentices in these trades. The group training organisations, the Master Builders Association and the construction industry training council are all working to have ACT young people participate in these activities. We hope more employers will take advantage of this opportunity to help meet the present and future skill needs in their industry.

One unexpected outcome of the bushfire tragedy is that the rebuilding activity is providing the real work experience needed by many young people to become tradespeople. Consultations with industry through the ACT Industry Training Advisory Association, or ACTITAA, are in fact broader ranging than simply dealing with skills shortages. They cover such issues as changes to training packages and their impact locally, new training opportunities in the ACT, issues that impede expansion of the delivery of nationally recognised training, industrial and equity issues that may cause barriers for the disadvantaged, and delivery of VET qualifications in schools. These discussions are held twice yearly after receipt of written industry analyses. They contribute to the development of priorities, governing expenditure by the ACT on vocational education and training.

As detailed in the government's economic white paper, we are committed to ensuring that the government school system is resourced to deliver skills in ICT—an emerging skills shortage area—to all school students. This will have a positive flow-on effect to the trainees and apprentices of tomorrow. In this, the ACT is leading the way nationally by being the first jurisdiction to introduce ICT competencies for year 10 students. Also

as stated in the white paper, the ACT's is on track to being the first Australian school system to be fully connected to broadband services. The government bolstered the capacity to focus on the vocational education and training needs of the ACT through establishing two new sections within its training and adult education branch. They are the career transition section and the new apprenticeships and VET initiatives section. The ACT government also continues to promote the importance of training to the ACT community.

I recently represented the Minister for Education and Training to announce the winners of the 2005 Adult Learners Week awards. These awards recognise the outstanding achievements in adult and community education. One of the main purposes of the week is to remind people that learning is for everyone. A great way to do that is to recognise the achievements of adult learners, teachers and organisations. Adult and community education complements the formal ACT education structure, in that it is committed to offering lifelong educational opportunities to all. This includes newcomers to the ACT, working people and professionals, those in transitional career change, older citizens, persons with special needs, and especially those who have not been able to participate more fully in formal education. In the Canberra plan this government has clearly stated its commitment to continuing support for adult community education as a means of promoting lifelong learning.

We also provide a school-based new apprenticeships program, which has proved a big success with its focus on supporting young people transitioning from school to employment. As of August, there were 256 new commencements in the SNAP program this year, with approximately 47 per cent of these young people currently gaining invaluable skills in the building and construction industry. Through our commitment to VET, the ACT government is continuing to ensure that any skills shortage in the ACT is addressed quickly. Due to the increase in its enrolments in the 2003-04 year, it is likely in the coming years that many apprentices trained in key areas will enter the territory work force. It is my belief that this will result in the ACT continuing to enjoy one of the best-trained and most talented work forces.

I would now like to quickly turn to the issue of mature age employment. It is true our population is ageing, but it is possible to see this as creating opportunities both for the city and for the individuals concerned. People can continue to earn an income and contribute to the city through meaningful work. How can this be achieved? Members may note that the commitment has been made to address mature age employment in priority 1 of the Canberra social plan, as part of the wider Canberra plan. In pursuing this goal, an action plan is under development and, to date, work on this has included a host of initiatives: hosting a mature age employment summit; establishing a working group; engaging a consultant to prepare the issues paper; drafting this into the draft action plan; and undertaking the viability draft action plan. These are many things this government is doing to address the issue.

MR SESELJA (Molonglo) (5.52): I am very happy to support the original motion put forward by Mr Mulcahy today. I commend him for his ongoing interest in this area. It is, as has been acknowledged on both sides of the house, a particularly important area and one that I am happy to have a debate about.

There does seem to be a bit of contradiction among government members. Firstly, if I can deal a bit with the issue of growth: we saw recently the Australia Institute's report suggesting that zero population growth in Canberra would be a good idea. Some people agree with that; many do not. I note that Jon Stanhope launched that report. He seemed to be giving his tacit approval to the idea that no growth would be a good thing for the ACT. The Chief Minister seems to feel that would be a good thing. Yet we see, certainly from Simon Corbell, all of the rhetoric about lots of cranes; it is a wonderful thing that we are growing; and all this sort of thing. There seems to be a bit of a difference of opinion within the government about whether growth is a good thing or not.

I would love to hear what the government's position is on it, because they do not seem to be clear. They certainly produce very low growth. We have seen 0.2 per cent in the ACT and 1.7 per cent in the region. We heard the Treasurer earlier saying that he did not believe the figures; he said that they are very suspicious figures because the rental market is strong and the like. I do not know where Mr Quinlan gets his figures, but the ABS stats are clear that the ACT, under this government, is growing very slowly indeed—a growth rate of 0.2 per cent in Canberra and 1.7 per cent in the region.

What does that tell us? I think that tells us that there is some sort of demand to live in the Canberra region, but clearly the policies of this government, to one degree or another, are causing people to choose to live elsewhere. I know friends of mine who have lived in Canberra all their lives and who have moved to Queanbeyan simply because of the option of cheaper housing in the area.

It is clear that there is demand; it is clear, though, that the government is doing something wrong. Mr Quinlan's response is to not believe the figures. I will stick to the figures of the ABS rather than believing Mr Quinlan's hunch that it is a lot more than 0.2 per cent growth in the ACT.

In the estimates process, when he was asked about growth in the region versus growth in Canberra, he said, "It does not really matter if Queanbeyan grows more than Canberra. If they live in Queanbeyan, Murrumbateman, Yass or Canberra, that does not matter." That is irresponsible from a member of the ACT government. It is important that we get our share of the regional growth. As the region grows, there is going to be more and more call on our resources and it is important that we see some of the revenue base that goes with that.

People who live in Queanbeyan use our roads a lot; they use our hospital system; they use our education system. Having them as non-contributors in terms of rates and in other areas of revenue is not a good outcome for the territory. So I disagree with Mr Quinlan's blasé attitude to whether or not the ACT gets its share of regional growth. It is important and this government has not pulled its weight to see that happen.

As I said at the outset, we look forward to seeing what the policy of this government is. Does it support growth in Canberra or does it not? Does it care? I certainly support growth in the ACT. It is crucially important. Some of the figures that Mr Smyth quoted before were quite frightening in terms of an ageing population, in terms of the taxation burden that is likely to be placed on young Canberrans in the future if we do not grow. That is of concern.

It might not be of concern to someone at Mr Quinlan's stage of life but it is certainly a concern to me. I have no doubt it is a concern to many other young Canberrans, in particular, who are going to be picking up that burden. And it should be a concern to older Canberrans as well because if we do not have growth and if we do not get the kind of revenue base that we need we are certainly not going to be able to provide the kind of adequate support for—

Motion (by **Mr Quinlan**) put:

That the question be now put.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 8		Noes 7	
Mr Berry	Ms MacDonald	Mrs Dunne	Mr Seselja
Mr Corbell	Ms Porter	Dr Foskey	Mr Smyth
Mr Gentleman	Mr Quinlan	Mr Mulcahy	Mr Stefaniak
Mr Hargreaves	Mr Stanhope	Mr Pratt	

Question so resolved in the affirmative.

Question put:

That **Mr Quinlan's** amendment be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 8		Noes 7	
Mr Berry	Ms MacDonald	Mrs Dunne	Mr Seselja
Mr Corbell	Ms Porter	Dr Foskey	Mr Smyth
Mr Gentleman	Mr Quinlan	Mr Mulcahy	Mr Stefaniak
Mr Hargreaves	Mr Stanhope	Mr Pratt	

Question so resolved in the affirmative

Amendment agreed to.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Personal explanations

DR FOSKEY (Molonglo): I seek leave, under standing order 46, to make a personal explanation.

MR SPEAKER: You may proceed.

DR FOSKEY: I want to correct a misapprehension expressed here this afternoon. I have heard myself accused of being opposed to population growth. I believe the words

“Luddite” and “totalitarian” were also used in relation to my contribution to the most recent debate. I am not going to address those second two, but it is important to me to have it very clearly on the record that at no time today did I say I was opposed to population growth. In fact, at no time do I ever say I am opposed to population growth. In fact, my PhD thesis was a project undertaken partly to refute the belief of some environmentalists that zero population growth will automatically bring environmental sustainability. It is very important to me to have it on the record that I do not oppose population growth per se because I have put so many hours and words into presenting a sophisticated argument against this very view.

It being past 6.00 pm, in accordance with standing order 34, the motion for the adjournment of the Assembly was put.

Adjournment

Muslim headscarves Education

MRS DUNNE (Ginninderra) (6.03): I want to touch on two issues. Recently some of my Liberal women colleagues have received some notoriety because of their desire to ban Muslim women wearing headscarves in government schools, apparently on the grounds that they are a symbol of defiance. I have followed the debate. Some of their critics missed the point when they said that, for the most part, people should be able to wear what they like, implying that there is no such thing as symbolism. We take a very dim view of anyone wearing Nazi paraphernalia because of its symbolic association with mass slaughter. We have seen the opprobrium attached to Prince Harry for his indiscretion in that regard.

I would disagree with Mesdames Bishop and Panopoulos on two points. I do not think that the headscarf symbolises defiance; I think it is a religious symbol and a symbol about modesty. I know that the vast majority of Muslims and the vast majority of headscarf-wearing Muslims and those of my acquaintance do not support the excesses of militant Islamists and al-Qaeda. I do not think you can stop such manifestations; that, itself, would lead to defiance. By suppressing cultural manifestations we create many more problems for ourselves.

I was very concerned about the things that were said by Mesdames Bishop and Panopoulos about the dominant culture in Australia. It needs to be said quite sternly that moderate Muslims, even worse than westerners, are victims of the sorts of things that were said. Things like this send the message that all Muslims are the same. It would be unfortunate if non-Muslims came to believe that all Muslims are the same, and it would be disastrous if Muslims did.

The other issue I wish to touch on is that, yesterday in the adjournment debate, Ms MacDonald made an intervention. I have one point of correction and two observations to make on that intervention. First, to the point of correction: Ms MacDonald alleged that my statement that education minister Gallagher is a product of the sixties is, in her words, “indeed incorrect”. I said that Ms Gallagher is “literally” a child of the sixties. This is certainly true as Ms Gallagher was born in March 1970. But that only serves to undermine Ms MacDonald’s claims.

The sixties, as a cultural term, refers roughly to the period from the early 1960s to at least 1975. There is admittedly some dispute over the particular year at either end of the time scale. Professor Arthur Marwick, for example, in his recent book *The sixties*, opts for 1958 to 1974, while Robert Hewison, in his book *Too much: art and society in the sixties*, prefers 1960 to 1975. Either way, there is no dealing with the cut-off point of 1969. But if you are literal minded, as Ms MacDonald intends to be, it is obvious that Ms Gallagher was conceived in 1969, which makes her literally a child of the sixties.

Two observations: Ms MacDonald complained about members on this side quoting from Kevin Donnelly. She pointed out that Dr Donnelly is a member of the Victorian right-wing section of the Liberal Party and is “sniffing around the seat of Kooyong”. I do not know where she managed to unearth that somewhat intimate information—and I will take her word for it—but, more seriously, she argued that he has a doctorate in education and, because he has never practised as an academic in the field, somehow his views do not have validity.

I should like to reveal to Ms MacDonald that the two most elementary fallacies regarding that, employed by demagogues, are: the argument to the person, and the argument from authority. Having a diploma in teaching, as Ms MacDonald let us know she has, she might well better know these arguments as *argumentum ad hominem* and *argumentum ad vericundiam*.

My simple point is that these are both fallacious arguments with no place in reasonable debate. In no way do they invalidate Dr Donnelly’s contention about the state of education. He could be the devil incarnate or even Mark Latham, and the fact has not the slightest effect on the validity or invalidity of his arguments. These must be assessed independently according to the accuracy of the premise and the soundness of the logic.

My second observation is a brief one. Ms MacDonald told the Assembly that she had not heard the name Piaget since doing her teaching qualification. I can only observe that, before she comments on pedagogical trends, past or present, she ought to keep up with the literature.

Education

MS MacDONALD (Brindabella) (6.08): I cannot let that one go. Thank you, Mrs Dunne, for amusing us all. Yes, indeed, you are correct. I was not certain of the exact date of Ms Gallagher’s birth, but she was more than a twinkle in her father’s eye in the sixties; that is true. In regard to those people who decide that the sixties go up to 1975: those of my acquaintance who were born after 1970 do not consider themselves to be children of the sixties. I have to tell you that, Mrs Dunne.

But on the issue of Dr Donnelly: Mrs Dunne has quoted parts of what I said last night. Certainly it is true that I quoted all those points about his being involved with the Liberal Party. My point was, Mrs Dunne—and I said quite clearly that Dr Donnelly was entitled to his opinion—that he should not be quoted as an impartial authority on the area.

Mrs Dunne: No-one said he was. I did not quote him.

MS MacDONALD: But Mr Pratt was.

Mrs Dunne: Mr Pratt did, but no-one said he was impartial.

MR SPEAKER: Order! This is not a conversation; this is a debate.

MS MacDONALD: I was making the point, through you, Mr Speaker, to Mrs Dunne that if Dr Donnelly is going to come out and make all these points he needs to make it quite clear; and other people who quote him need to make it quite clear, what stance he takes.

Mr Scott Parkin

DR FOSKEY (Molonglo) (6.10): In June this year a man came to Australia to do the kinds of things that tourists love to do here. During his holiday, he camped in the Whitsundays; he snorkelled on the Great Barrier Reef, which he described to a friend as “like swimming in my aquarium”; he considered and refused a job on a crocodile farm near Innisfail; he worked as a willing worker on organic farms near Brisbane. He planned to go from Australia to New Zealand for six weeks, then have a month in South East Asia before heading home to Houston, Texas. Who is he?

To the embarrassment of most Australians, 10 weeks into his holiday, his plans were short-circuited. He found himself a person of interest to ASIO and refused a request, which he was assured was voluntary, to come and have an interview. A few days later he was sitting having a coffee in the Kaleidoscope Cafe in Brunswick when 10 men walked in. A moment later he rang his friend to say that he had been detained by the AFP and immigration agents. He was taken to Carlton west station and then parked in maximum security lockdown and solitary confinement at the Melbourne Prisoner Assessment Centre. Not only that, he was lobbed with a bill for \$11,000 for accommodation and the fares for him and two guards back to the United States.

Many people have asked the vexed question: “Why was this man, who was holidaying in Australia”—something that I thought we want people to do—“detained and deported?” The answer must lie in a very broad and political interpretation of laws that the federal government wants to strengthen. Scott Parkin was a tourist who believed in non-violent activism against injustice. Some of his Aussie friends are social change activists, and they invited him to run workshops and attend conferences and events opposing the Forbes global CEO conference in Sydney in late August.

Scott Parkin works for a United States airline, sourcing parts and repairs, and teaches American history part time at a Houston community college, which is equivalent to one of our TAFE colleges. He was given a visa to come to Australia after an interview with an Australian immigration official, who questioned him at some length about his dressing as Tony the Tiger at a demonstration outside Exxon-Mobil’s AGM in 2003, for which he was arrested for civil disobedience.

Scott Parkin is also quite active in making people aware of the role of Halliburton in the rebuilding of Iraq. He opposed that war. He describes himself as “a non-violent person, a peace activist, I organise peace events, I do talks”. That person could have been me. It

could have been some of the rest of us. Extending anti-terror laws seems like an invasion of human rights to me.

Canberra and region—growth Immigration

MR SESELJA (Molonglo) (6.13): I got cut off there in mid-flight by Mr Quinlan. I do not know if he did not like what I was saying about him and me being at different stages of life and all that sort of thing. For whatever reason, he wanted to shut down debate, which is disappointing.

I want to finish some points and restate some of the points that I made. We are yet to see from this government—

MR SPEAKER: You should not reflect on a vote. It was the vote of the Assembly that terminated the debate.

MR SESELJA: It was not about the vote. I was not reflecting on the vote. I was reflecting on the fact that in mid-flight he shut it down. I do not think that is reflecting on a vote.

MR SPEAKER: If you want to finish your speech, go for your life; but you should not reflect on decisions of the Assembly.

Mr Quinlan: He probably worked on it for hours.

MR SESELJA: Yes, hours went into this, I tell you. I have been slaving away. Nonetheless, I will not reflect on any of what went before. I will talk about certain issues. The point needs to be made that we are seeing some contradictory signs coming from this government about what they want for growth. On the one hand, we have got Mr Quinlan saying he does not care where the growth happens; whether it happens outside Canberra or inside Canberra; he does not believe the figures. I find that hard to believe, but he says he does not believe the figures; there is something fishy about them. On the other hand, we see Mr Stanhope launching books about what a wonderful world it would be if Canberra were not to grow.

We are seeing some contradictions from the government and I call upon them to give us a clear statement. They put out a lot of population projections, but they have not said whether they support there being growth in the territory or whether they are happy for it to stay as it is at 0.2 per cent or less or for it to go backwards. I look forward to hearing from the government on what they believe about growth.

I want to talk a bit about the negative perceptions of Canberra, which was raised in earlier debate. It is a real issue. I was interested that Mr Stanhope dismissed people who say Canberra is boring. People say Canberra is boring; there is no doubt about it. I do not share that view, but it is a perception that is out there. We spoke to some St Clares girls who visited the Assembly this week, and that was the message they gave us. That is the reality of the situation. It is not about shooting the messenger; it is about addressing the situation. Why is there that perception? And what can we do to address it?

Some of the things that Mr Mulcahy spoke about, such as what Adelaide City Council is doing to get young people to stay in the city, should be looked at closely by this government. The bigger issue is about job opportunities and about the ability to buy a house, at entry level, at a decent price. That is one of the reasons why we are seeing people move out of Canberra and into the region and away. It is disappointing when the government dismisses those issues as non-issues or shoots the messenger. They are significant issues that need to be addressed if we are going to grow. Growth is important. I am happy to put it on the record that I think growth in the territory is important, at a reasonable rate.

Dr Foskey spoke a bit, later on, about how she was not anti-growth. I do not know if she is anti-growth or not, but I know that the Greens have a chequered history in their attitude to immigration. I would like to put the point to Dr Foskey that her party was consistently about zero population growth in this country because of the ecological footprint, but changed their policy in 2001 when the *Tampa* came along because they saw a political opportunity. At their core, the Greens do not believe in immigration.

It is an insular, xenophobic party. They try to make out that they are the friends of the refugees and are the friends of this and that. They are the friends of the refugees but not of mass immigration. I do not think they have a very clear policy. They take a holier-than-thou attitude to it consistently. I am pro-refugee and pro-immigration. It is a good thing for this country. I do not look upon every human life as to what their ecological footprint might be; I look at the inherent value of that person rather than whether or not they are going to use some water or have some sort of impact on the environment.

I am concerned when Dr Foskey makes herself out to be pro-immigration, pro-growth or whatever. Consistently the Greens have not been about that; consistently the Greens have been anti-immigration. I do not think they have changed their colours overnight. They have done it for populist reasons, to appeal to a certain part of the population that was anti-Howard at the time of the *Tampa* affair. That is the truth of it; that is the truth of what the Greens believe. It would be good if they could stand up and say what they believe rather than just engaging in populist politics, as we see from Dr Brown and Dr Foskey.

Junior rugby league finals

MR GENTLEMEN (Brindabella) (6.18): It is that time of the year again. Parents fret, coaches pace and the players nervously wait for that big day. Yes, I am talking about the under-11s rugby league grand final. Last Saturday, I attended the grand final series at Bruce Stadium. Two formidable opponents met on the paddock—Cooma, aka the Junior Cockroaches, and the locals from south Tuggeranong. From the sounding of the starting hooter, the crowd knew that this would be a nail-biter. And we were not disappointed.

South Tuggeranong provided fantastic defence, keeping the Junior Roaches at bay and then went on the attack, testing the stamina of the kids from Cooma. What these players lacked in size, they made up for in courage and determination. The set plays developed into opportunities with south Tuggeranong taking the ball up to Cooma's line five times in the latter half of the game, only to be held up or denied by the determined Roaches.

This game went down to the wire and, at full time, there was no victor, with both teams having scored five points.

Like all spectators there on Saturday, I was exhausted just watching the game, with its twists and turns. But we had to press on, enduring another 10 minutes of nail-biting action as the game went into extra time. Tuggeranong went in hard and immediately took control. So overwhelming was their attack on Cooma, the Cooma coach had to take a quick restroom break. His absence spurred the Junior Roaches on, who quickly came back strongly. Forget about the players; every parent in the crowd had worked up a sweat with anticipation.

But all good things must come to an end and, at the sounding of the final hooter, I am proud to say that the local lads from south Tuggeranong came out on top. Not only were we in the audience given the opportunity to see the great talent of these teams, we also got to see their great sportsmanship, with both teams cheering each other at the conclusion of the game.

It gave me great pleasure to present the south Tuggeranong players and the kids from Cooma with their awards at the stadium. I could see the excitement in their eyes as Terry Campese and Alan Rothery from the Canberra Raiders shook their hands and posed with us all for a photo. But these boys are now media and sports stars in their own right, making page 2 of the sports supplement of yesterday's *Canberra Times*.

I would like to thank the minister for sport, Mr Quinlan, for allowing me to represent him. Congratulations to Danny Harley, the CEO of Canberra Stadium, for organising the event, and to Karen Ebbsworth from the Canberra District Junior Rugby League. Special congratulations to the players, their coaches, parents and supporters for a wonderful day,

Western Districts Rugby Club

MR STEFANIAK (Ginninderra) (6.21): I suppose I could talk about being a child of the sixties even though I was born in 1952, but I will not.

MR SPEAKER: Why not? I would like to hear you explain it.

MR STEFANIAK: Like Mr Gentleman, I attended some grand finals on the weekend. I would like to pass on my congratulations—

Mr Quinlan: Can you build an atmosphere like Mick did?

MR STEFANIAK: That is a hard act to follow. I say this with some trepidation because most of my football, as members probably realise, was played with Royals and, to a lesser extent, University, and it is always, in a way, a bit hard to congratulate old rivals, even though my step-son and my 12-year-old play with them now. Indeed, my late brother-in-law was a prominent second grader there in the eighties. I am referring to the Western Districts Rugby Club, the premier rugby club in my electorate, and the superb performance by the club over the weekend. They won first to fourth grade and colts, a feat that I do not think has been done before. Wests last won all four grades then available in 1974. I think Royals managed to do it for a couple of years running. Now that the colts are in the competition too, this was a truly mighty effort.

They won the club championship. In first grade they won an absolute nail-biter, 19 points to 17, defeating Tuggeranong. Tuggeranong got a try in extra time and did not convert it. A lot of people were a bit worried then but, in a top display by Wests, they also got a try. Craig Robberds converted it. He had an exceptionally good game. He is a three times Macdougall medal winner, which is a great feat in itself. Behind a very good, aggressive, solid forward pack, he kept turning the play around with some brilliant, well-judged kicks. The rest of the back line's defence was superb, too.

The second grade saw a solid 27 to 14 win to Wests against Tuggeranong. My old mate Frank Walmsley, second grade captain and prop, put in a sterling effort. Frank does wander around the field like the large prop he is. He was magnificent in the scrums. He came on as a pair of fresh legs, as it were, just before the end of the first grade game, which then went into extra time, and took the ball up a few times with a couple of great barging runs. Well done, Frank, on two premierships.

In third grade, Wests won 14 nil. They were the form side all year. In fourth grade, in a nail-biter, they got up, beating Tuggeranong 17 to 16. In colts they won 36 to 22. It was a Wests v Tuggeranong series, except for the third grade, where Royals got into the grand final, which was good to see as well.

I congratulate everyone involved with Wests, specifically Geoff Stokes, who always downplays how good his team is. He is a master tactician and excellent coach. Again, he has pulled off a magnificent premiership. Geoff, well done to you.

Some other up and coming young players who probably played in their first first grade grand final include Jarrett Budworth, who is also a Vikings player and is off to England, probably with a sore head. He went off on Monday. It was a top display by him. Matt Sutherland, who is a contemporary of Frank—Frank looks a lot older than he probably is but he and Matt came up from the very successful Wests under-18 teams of recent years, coached by Brian Van Arkel—played in this fourth first grade premiership out of four. Players like Matt and Frank are still only young blokes and have got a lot in them. It was a top effort by everyone involved.

It is a magnificent feat for a club to win every single grand final that they participated in. Wests are to be congratulated. They celebrated long and hard. My congratulations to everyone involved with the Wests club on a particularly brilliant effort.

Mr Speaker, in terms of explaining what a child of the sixties is: I do not think I will bother. That was an amusing debate we had earlier. Suffice it to say that I thought that if you grew up as a kid in a period of time—

Mr Quinlan: Can you explain what Vicki Dunne said?

MR STEFANIAK: I cannot explain what either of those two members said. We will have to read *Hansard* to see what they are on about there. If I am a child of the sixties, Ted, you would have to be one of the early sixties or late fifties. We have probably got a few children here of the seventies, the eighties and perhaps even the nineties.

I wanted to make those comments particularly to congratulate the Western Districts Rugby Union Club on an absolutely superb season and a superb effort.

Vietnamese full moon festival

MS PORTER (Ginninderra) (6.26): I was born in 1942, just in case anybody wanted to know. It was a great pleasure to be present at the celebration of the 2005 Vietnamese full moon festival last Saturday evening. One of the great pleasures for me of being a member of the government is being able to attend such functions. The Vietnamese full moon festival has been celebrated for many hundreds of years and preserves a cultural tradition that was brought to Canberra by Vietnamese migrants and refugees and has been celebrated here for the past 30 years.

It is a joyous occasion, also known as the children's festival, a beautiful tradition that brings great colour, such as coloured lanterns and traditional dress, and great feasting, including moon cakes—a chance for the whole family to get together. In fact, children are allowed to stay up late. Also at this time they celebrate the harvest festival.

When I attend festivals such as this I am constantly reminded that what unites us as people is much greater than what divides us, and I congratulate the multicultural community of the ACT for the part they play in breaking down the barriers that may exist between different communities. Sharing our cultural heritage is at the core of multiculturalism.

The ACT government is committed to building a stronger community and, as members know, encourages participation in community life, especially in celebrating the culture and diversity of Canberra. So I was very pleased to join with the Vietnamese people in celebrating their tradition and keeping it alive, as they do with the Vietnamese language school, the Vietnamese programming on community radio and their wonderful Lunar New Year celebrations that I was honoured to attend earlier this year.

Multiculturalism is not only about equality and social and cultural life but also economic and political life. I commend the hard work and dedication of the Vietnamese community, and I congratulate them for their contributions to the development of the cultural, political, and economic life of Canberra. It is issues and events such as these that make Canberra the vibrant and rich multicultural community it is.

I am very pleased that the ACT government is able to provide some support for these initiatives through the multicultural grants program and, most recently, through the establishment of the new multicultural centre. I am very pleased to mention here that the first of the peak multicultural bodies, the Migrant Resource Centre, moved into the new multicultural centre recently. I was at the MRC AGM last week, and the staff were delighted to be able to move into their new home.

By the end of November, the ACT Vietnamese Community in Australia ACT Chapter will also be moving into the new centre. I know that their president is very pleased about this because he has been running the organisation from his dining room table, rather similar to what I used to do with Volunteering ACT when it first started.

I know these new premises will be significant in supporting the ACT Vietnamese community, and I would also like to pay tribute to all the volunteers who worked so hard to bring the full moon festival to life. Without their efforts, it simply would not happen. As the former CEO of Volunteering ACT, I am well aware of the significant value that is generated by volunteers, and I congratulate all of them.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

The Assembly adjourned at 6.30 pm.