



Debates

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Wednesday, 5 March 2008

Petition: Griffith oval (No 1)	473
Utilities (Network Facilities Tax) Repeal Bill 2008	473
Hospitals—overhaul	477
Federal funding cuts.....	497
Question time (Statement by Speaker)	506
Questions without notice:	
Hospitals—funding	506
Housing—public.....	509
Hospitals—staffing	512
Environment—green waste programs	514
Dragway.....	516
Education—Canberra Institute of Technology.....	517
Balloon Aloft	521
ACTION bus service—network	525
Hospitals—emergency department.....	528
Balloon Aloft	530
ACT Policing—performance.....	533
Personal explanation	534
Supplementary answer to question on notice:	
Health—radiopharmaceuticals	535
Personal explanations.....	535
Federal funding cuts.....	536
Health—asbestos related disease and injury	559
Adjournment:	
Schools—closures	567
Gender and climate change.....	568
National Electrical and Communications Association	570
St Vincent de Paul	571
Housing—public.....	571
International Youth Week	572
Housing—public.....	572
Schools—closures	573

Wednesday, 5 March 2008

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.

Petition

The following petition was lodged for presentation, by Mr Mulcahy, from 75 residents:

Griffith oval (No 1)

To the Speaker and Members of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory.

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

There is a Development Application to construct a fence around Griffith Oval (No 1), a public playing field.

Your petitioners therefore request the Assembly to:

Disallow any planning application to fence in Griffith Oval (No 1)

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

Utilities (Network Facilities Tax) Repeal Bill 2008

Mr Mulcahy, pursuant to notice, presented the bill.

Title read by Clerk.

MR MULCAHY (Molonglo) (10.32): I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

It gives me great pleasure to speak in favour of the Utilities (Network Facilities Tax) Repeal Bill in light of the recent financial reports of the territory which show that the government is building a war chest of revenue due to its continuing high levels of taxation.

I am somewhat dismayed, although certainly I was not surprised, that this bill was defeated by the government's numbers when it was previously proposed last year. It is, sadly, indicative of the government's attitude that it has continually increased the burden of taxation on ACT residents and has overlooked or squandered the many opportunities for relief.

At the same time that the federal Labor government is going some way towards reducing the size of government in Australia, its ACT colleagues are still wedded to an unshakeable big government mentality. They are taxing and spending with impunity, with Canberrans picking up the tab for their waste. They have squandered a great many opportunities to create a more efficient and effective government throughout their terms in office. They have squandered the opportunity to reform the ACT tax system when the GST was introduced. They have increased existing taxes and introduced new ones. More recently, they have squandered an opportunity to provide relief by refusing to repeal the utilities tax.

The government are awash with money. It is a matter of public record. They are receiving more revenue than ever before, and they are, in fact, in a position to provide much-needed tax relief. The December quarter financial report has continued the trend of revealing underestimation of tax revenues and has demonstrated that the current tax regime in the ACT is excessive. The report showed \$57 million in allegedly unanticipated tax revenue, including \$23.1 million in commercial conveyance revenue, \$23.4 million in residential conveyance revenue and \$9.5 million in stamp duty on shares and securities. This has been a continuing trend in the ACT government. Each quarterly report shows a higher and higher level of allegedly unanticipated tax revenue, and the ACT Treasury seem either unable or unwilling to adjust their estimates to reflect their consistent underestimation.

The people of the ACT have been told for years that the taxes imposed by their government are necessary to fund services. They have suffered the burden of increases to taxation, with the government assuring them that such measures were a necessary evil. However, the necessity of these taxes has been consistently belied by the actual revenues reported in the quarterly reports. The revised forward estimates in the December quarter report show an anticipated surplus of \$196 million. The revised estimate for the total taxation revenue for this financial year has now broken the \$1 billion mark.

To put this enormous figure into perspective, I note that the total taxation revenue for the government in the 2001-02 financial year, when the Stanhope government first took office, was \$631 million. Since then, taxation revenue has increased by 58.5 per cent, which is an increase of almost eight per cent per annum. In the last decade, we have seen the introduction of the GST, which was supposed to be accompanied by state and territory tax reform. Whilst the government has repealed some ACT taxes in order to satisfy its minimum obligations under the intergovernmental agreement on the GST, it has, at the same time, introduced a range of new taxes and dramatically increased its existing rates and charges. This action, in my view, has been in clear contrast to the spirit of the agreement, which was to allow states and territories an opportunity for comprehensive taxation reform. Instead of taking this opportunity to reform its tax system, the ACT government has used the GST as a cash cow whilst continuing to raise many other taxes.

Turning particularly to the utilities tax, which was introduced in the 2006-07 ACT budget, it was a quite ill-considered and unnecessary measure which was justified at the time on the basis of shaky revenue figures issued by the ACT Department of

Treasury—figures which have now been shown to have been substantially underestimated. The utilities tax applies to the infrastructure for utility providers and therefore penalises any further investment in infrastructure. Much of the cost is passed on to consumers, resulting in higher costs for water, electricity, gas, sewerage and telecommunications services in the territory.

Because of these costs being passed on, the utilities tax has been a substantial imposition on Canberra households. According to the Treasurer's answer to a question on notice in May 2006, the average cost per household from the tax will be \$131 in the 18-month period since the tax was introduced in January 2007 until the end of the current financial year.

The reform I am proposing is a modest tax reform. It is not a radical proposal by any means and would merely remove one of the taxes that this government has introduced unnecessarily in recent years. The utilities tax is forecast to generate \$16.5 million in revenue in this financial year. This amount is less than 10 per cent of the enormous budget surplus that the government is forecast to achieve from its continual increases in taxes and charges over the last few years. The repeal of the tax would go some small way towards restoring sanity to the current ACT tax regime. If the government were really serious about its previous argument that tax increases were needed to balance this budget, it would now be looking to repeal those increases in light of its enormous revenue windfalls.

Despite its previous obstinacy, there is some sign that the government finally may be starting to take this issue seriously. On 15 February this year, following the release of the December quarter financial report, the *Canberra Times* reported that the Chief Minister had hinted that he may wind back some of the tax increases imposed by his government and that there was capacity to do so within the budget. He was quoted as saying that "it's an option that we can realistically explore". Indeed, some of his comments in question time yesterday reaffirmed that that option is very much now on the table.

The bill that we are considering today would not relieve ACT residents of the tax increases imposed on them in the 2006-07 budget. It would repeal only a small part of the taxes and tax increases introduced in that budget. However, it would provide some relief to the people of Canberra on their utility bills and allow them to gain some autonomy from their government. In fact, it would be a tax reduction enjoyed by every household in the territory.

Despite higher and higher tax revenues and consistent underestimation of its revenues, the government have repeatedly argued against any reduction in taxes, claiming that the money is required for government services. This argument has become increasingly strained as the government's own financial reports have shown a large war chest of revenue resulting from their tax increases. What was needed, and what is still needed, is a commitment to improve the efficiency of government services rather than a reliance on the bottomless pit of taxpayers' wallets.

The government is committed to increasing the size of government in the ACT. This government has shown a strongly engrained big government mentality and,

unfortunately, a ravenous appetite for spending other people's money. We have even heard a speech by a minister in this government suggesting that the family home should be subject to capital gains tax—a proposal which would be ruinous for Canberra families if it ever came to fruition. It runs counter to all of the economic advice I have ever seen. It was an ill-conceived initiative floated in Australia some years ago and very quickly abandoned as a concept.

The provision of government services does not require the kinds of continual increases in taxation that we have seen from the present government. It is not a matter of forgoing tax reform in order to fund necessary services. On the contrary, the provision of additional services has become something of an afterthought, with a new appropriation bill being introduced into the Assembly only a short time after the most recent budget in order to allow the government to spend some of its excess revenue. I know that my colleague Dr Foskey has argued on occasions against tax increases in order to spend more on services. It does not give regard to the fact that you can achieve improvement in services with improvements in efficiency, and you do not have to bleed the community dry by constantly hitting the family budget with these sorts of tax charges.

I have no doubt that this government is gearing up to a pre-election promise-a-thon in which it will do all it can to secure seats in this Assembly by throwing around money from the war chest it has built up through its regime of excessive taxation. By plundering the people of the ACT of their hard-earned money, the government already has a projected surplus of \$200 million to throw around. Of course, one suspects that the actual surplus may be even higher, with the Department of Treasury continuing its unofficial policy of underestimation of tax revenues—a characteristic which I understand even occurred under the previous government, as Treasury always seeks to paint a grim and bleak picture to discourage ministers from retreating from the idea of high levels of tax.

The government has already indicated that the current financial position of the territory gives capacity for tax reform. This is a perfect opportunity for it to allow some much-needed relief. I hope that the government will consider supporting this bill and allow some relief from the tax burden it has imposed on the people of Canberra in recent years. More than this, I hope that the government will reconsider the direction it is taking in respect of the size of government in the ACT. I hope that it will reconsider those other tax increases that it has imposed on the people of Canberra and make every possible effort to restrain its spending and provide further tax relief.

Time and time again, residents raise with me the stress they are experiencing because the value of their homes has increased so dramatically as a result of the growth in property prices in the territory, but they do not have income increases to match. Often, they are on a commonwealth or territory public service pension, or some other form of fixed income. Whilst they may live in an area which has seen significant capital growth, they do not have the additional capacity to fund rate increases based on those property increases.

The argument is that they can seek to have those debts attached to the property and it will be a problem for the heirs to their estate. But those of us who have dealt regularly

with older people know that most people towards the end of their years do not want to have a situation where they leave debt. By the same token, many older people who are physically able do not want to leave their homes and move into supported care. They would rather stay in the environment and the neighbourhood where they have raised their families and lived throughout their lives. So the option of packing up and moving is not one that many older people find appealing. The possibility of accumulating debt because they cannot fund their rate increases is also abhorrent to many of our older people.

The tax increases on property, whilst recognising growth in the market, do not take into account in any real way the position of those many senior people who find themselves quite distressed as they see those charges come in and wonder how they are going to fund them out of an income stream that is adjusted only on the basis of the consumer price index.

I am happy to see that the opposition are still making comments in the media that are supportive of reductions in taxation. The *Canberra Times* reported the shadow Treasurer's view that the government is reaping the rewards from higher taxes and that the community deserves some relief. I agree with this assessment and I think that it supports the bill that is before us. I hope that the opposition will follow up on these remarks and vote in favour of the present bill, as it was a bill they were happy to support only a matter of months ago. It is a sentiment that is consistent with the expressions they have made. It is a bill that seeks to remove what is deemed to be an inefficient tax. It is a bill that will, in fact, extend relief across the entire ACT community.

This is a perfect opportunity for the territory government to show through actions rather than simple words that they recognise that the surplus they are now enjoying should be shared amongst all of our community. It is not a radical change in terms of the taxes forgone. The forward projections, even on the conservative forecasting provided by the Treasury, make it very clear that this is manageable, achievable, responsible and equitable. I commend this bill to the House and I hope in particular that the major parties who have hinted at support for tax reform will now put their money where their mouth is and support this proposal.

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

Hospitals—overhaul

MR MULCAHY (Molonglo) (10.46): I move the motion standing in my name on the notice paper relating to the timetable for the overhaul of Canberra's hospitals:

That this Assembly:

- (1) notes with concern the recent State of Government Services report by the Productivity Commission that shows that waiting times for both elective surgery and treatment in the emergency department of Canberra's hospitals remain the worst in the country;
- (2) welcomes the recent announcement by the ACT Government that it is considering a major overhaul of Canberra's hospitals; and

- (3) calls on the ACT Government to provide to the Legislative Assembly a timetable for the implementation of these changes as soon as possible.

I welcome the opportunity to debate this motion. I drafted it to both recognise the well-documented problems within Canberra's hospitals and tentatively welcome news that the government is, at the very least, planning considerable changes to and significant overhaul of the hospital system.

The dire state of ACT public hospitals is set out in the report on government services undertaken by the Australian government Productivity Commission. This report echoes what we have seen in other reports such as reports of the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare and the Australian government state of our hospitals reports. Despite this, members of the Assembly that have raised concerns about this issue have had some trouble getting through with their message to the government.

In light of the quite damning evidence that has been confirmed again and again by report after report, the Minister for Health has continued to claim that there is no evidence of problems in ACT public hospitals. In the debate on the Public Hospital Board Bill on 21 November 2007, the minister stated:

We have a major tertiary referral centre. We are servicing a region. Every single day our emergency department deals with over 150 people coming in seeking treatment. Our outcomes are the best in the country, Mrs Burke. The delivery of services at the Canberra Hospital rivals every hospital in the country—and you hate it. You hate that they deliver that level of service.

This is reported in *Hansard* at pages 3611 to 3612.

This is a rather extraordinary comment which totally contradicts what we have seen in national reports from a range of different sources. All of these reports are telling us that the costs in the ACT are the highest in the country and that waiting times in ACT public hospitals are the worst in the country.

The recent report on government services by the Australian Productivity Commission is just the latest to confirm this sorry state of affairs. In question time yesterday, I heard the minister refusing to accept claims that had been made in this place about us having significant problems in terms of waiting times for surgery, for emergency treatment and for elective surgery. These are not my words or the words of any other member here; they are taken directly from the report.

I refer the minister to table 10.6 of the report, which shows that the ACT had the lowest percentage of patients who were seen within the triage category time frames for emergency treatment—the lowest percentage of patients seen. This is clearly set out in the report. The report indicates that only 52 per cent of patients in the ACT were seen within these times. The average for the whole of Australia is 69 per cent, with every other jurisdiction achieving the time frames for at least 60 per cent of their patients.

I go to waiting times for elective surgery, an area in which I, Ms MacDonald and Dr Foskey had a particular interest due to a public accounts inquiry conducted in this

area. I refer the minister to table 10.7 of the report, which shows that the ACT had the longest waiting times for elective surgery. At each of the percentiles shown in the report, the ACT had the highest waiting times for elective surgery. At the 50th percentile, ACT patients waited 61 days compared to a national average of 32 days. At the 90th percentile, ACT patients waited 372 days compared to a national average of 237 days. The ACT also had the highest percentage of patients waiting more than a year for elective surgery: 10.3 per cent of patients wait more than one year for elective surgery, compared with a national average of 4.6 per cent.

I have previously made the point that this poor performance has not necessarily been due to a lack of money. In fact, the ACT has been spending more than any other jurisdiction. In particular, on a casemix adjusted separation basis the recurrent cost has been higher in the ACT than in any other jurisdiction in Australia. I made the same observation after the budget in 2005; we still seem to be in the same predicament.

It is quite extraordinary to look over these reports, because again and again we see the ACT spending the most money but achieving lower standards of service. This is quite clear evidence that there are some gross inefficiencies in ACT public hospitals and that there is substantial scope for improvement. There is substantial scope for greater service if the government matched the performance of other jurisdictions.

When I say that there are inefficiencies in the hospitals, I want to make sure that I do not get misconstrued, misreported or misinterpreted as reflecting on the quality of those working on the front line of health care. Somebody made the remark to me the other day—and that person is involved in nursing—that they are getting quite distressed at the hospital because people are coming in aware of the ongoing debate about health and the management of the hospital system and are making the inaccurate assumption that the people working there on the front line must not be medically competent. There is no basis for that sort of statement. It is very important that the public understand that those that are working there seem to be doing the very best they can under not easy circumstances.

In my comments here about efficiencies, I am talking about managerial efficiencies and the way in which the resources are allocated. My concern is that those who are working on the front line are complaining that they are under-resourced and understaffed, and this contributes to the delays that people are experiencing. I do not think it is fair to interpret that as saying that we do not have competent people in our hospitals. On the occasions when my family has had to use the hospital—with some exceptions back in the early part of this decade, which influenced my decision to run for this place—overall the experiences have been fairly positive and the people seem very dedicated. So I put that qualifier on these remarks.

The figures from the Productivity Commission confirm what we have seen in previous reports by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare and the Australian government state of our hospitals reports. We cannot do anything about this problem if we continue to ignore the evidence. The minister has attempted to brag about the performance of ACT public hospitals in the Assembly; it may be a nice way of stirring up some patriotic ACT fervour by posturing herself as a friend of hospital

workers, but it does not reflect the reality of the performance that is received by patients.

Only by first accepting those facts—the facts about the time delays and problems—can we solve the problems and try to improve the efficiency of health services in this territory. It is about time that the ACT government recognised the evidence of poor performance through a formal motion in the Assembly, which is what I am seeking to do today. I would like the government to at least recognise that there are significant concerns about key statistics in ACT hospitals. We cannot be in a constant state of denial. If we are in a constant state of denial about performance, then performance will never improve to the level that the public can reasonably expect.

Aside from recognising the evidence of poor performance in the report on government services, this motion calls for the Assembly to welcome the recent announcement by the ACT government on its consideration of a major overhaul of Canberra hospitals. I believe in giving credit where credit is due; it is good to see that the government is giving greater consideration to this problem than it has in the past. I have said in public circumstances and the media that the ACT needs a state-of-the-art health system.

Whilst we have not yet heard an outline of the government's proposals in detail, I am happy to see that more ideas are being put on the table. I will be particularly interested to see the government's timetable for the implementation of changes in the ACT hospitals. We need to look to new technologies; look at alternative patient and surgical management systems—we heard something about that this week—and in general be prepared to make significant changes to the system that is, as I have outlined in some detail, not performing as well as it should.

Based on the minimal detail that is available from the government's announcement several weeks ago, it would appear that such improvements are at least in the mix. I welcome this consideration. On 11 February, under the headline "Health-care reform plan for Canberra", the *Canberra Times* reported a host of different reforms that are being addressed by the territory government, including expansion of the emergency department; expansion of the day surgery unit; more beds; and more operating theatres, including a state-of-the-art brain lab. Hopefully we will do a little bit better with our theatres than they did in New South Wales; I am sure we will. They also included the creation of an integrated cancer centre, an area of enormous interest to our ageing community; opening a one-stop ambulatory centre; and providing more car parking. Out at Calvary, again there are plans to open more beds, expand the emergency department and open more operating theatres.

The community health area has also been highlighted. There are plans to set up a new community health centre in Gungahlin, where we have a massive demand with young families, and for various other measures that have been announced. No doubt the minister will talk about that in some detail.

These are good initiatives. It sounds as though the message is being heard loud and clear. But the biggest single issue in this territory that people raise is the state of health. There is nothing else that I hear higher on the radar. There are complaints

about a range of different issues, but that is the one that consistently comes up as number one.

The motion I have submitted today welcomes the announcement to consider overhauling the hospitals. It does not lend support or opposition to any specific measure proposed by the government. I look forward to being able to welcome new proposals and plans after considering their merits when full details are made available to the Assembly. The broad welcome of an announcement to consider the overhaul of the system should allow members of this Assembly to support the motion even if they have reservations about particular proposals or different ideas on what should be done. We should at least be able to agree with one another that something must be done to improve the state of Canberra's health system.

The motion also calls on the government to provide the Assembly with a timetable for implementation for these changes as soon as possible. I know from a recent briefing with ACT Health officials that the hospital is reaching a point where we have almost run out of room to expand using existing space and resources. Before too long, it will be impossible to reclaim more beds. I thank the minister and the officials of the department for making that briefing available. The information that was provided by the director of public health and his officials and advisers from the minister's office was very productive. If it has not happened already, I would urge the opposition and Dr Foskey to seek a briefing on where things are going, particularly in areas of capacity. When you are armed with the sort of information that was presented to me, it helps temper ill-considered initiatives and proposals, because certain things are not practical within the constraints of the current system. And it helps one understand the direction ACT Health plans to go in to meet the needs of the growing population.

We need—and I cannot stress this enough—a change or new program to serve the ACT into the future. A major feature of the government's announcement of changes to ACT public hospitals has been its focus on the growing pressure on hospitals due to an ageing population. In discussions on this matter, we have heard many figures cited about the future demography of the ACT and what this will mean for an ACT public hospital system that is already in serious trouble. As I have probably said previously here, when I call on residents, door-knocking in the suburbs of Canberra, I meet people who look to be in good physical health and who tell me they are in good physical health but who are very apprehensive about circumstances arising where they may need to use the system for various levels of care. The stories of delays and the like cause people to become very anxious.

We need to accept the fact that with an ageing population it is going to cost a lot more money to run this system. We need to be planning well ahead—I am told by the department they are—and ensuring that the people of Canberra can consider the health system with a measure of confidence. We need to take the health system off the position of being the number one area of concern in this community.

It is important that we are able to compare these projections in terms of future demands with the timetables for changes to ACT hospitals, to ensure that we will end up with a system that is able to cope with the higher level of patients we expect in the future. This is also important from a budgetary perspective, as an overhaul of the

public health system or public hospital system will involve substantial capital expenditure.

I will take this opportunity to make one thing perfectly clear to the government: if they intend their proposed upgrades to the ACT public hospital system to be a major election issue for their government, they owe the people of the ACT more than a vague outline of what they will do; they owe them some specifics. I hope that a clear timetable and costing for these changes will be available to the Assembly and to the public so that they are able to be properly considered as they are brought before the community.

I commend this motion to the Assembly. I believe that it provides a clear recognition of the evidence of poor performance that must be confronted; a tentative show of support for the government's proposed changes; and the need for a clear commitment to give greater specifics on these changes—most specifically, a timetable of new developments.

MS GALLAGHER (Molonglo—Minister for Health, Minister for Children and Young People, Minister for Disability and Community Services, Minister for Women) (11.01): I thank Mr Mulcahy for the opportunity to talk about the ACT's public health system. Over the last six budgets, this government has increased the health budget by about 60 per cent; that is, the cost of providing health services for the ACT community increased from \$472 million to just over \$800 million in 2007-08.

It is more than 18 months since the report on government services was delivered. There are some genuine improvements in access to services in the ACT. I have never stood here and said that there is no problem with the health system. I have never said that our times around waits for elective surgery or in the emergency department are appropriate or adequate. Yes, I do defend the health system. Yes, I do say we have outcomes that are the best in the country: on the basis of outcomes, we do. On waits for elective surgery, or some elective surgery, and for some categories of emergency department attention, we need to improve. But I have never stood here and said that we do not need to do that.

We know that people in the ACT choose the ACT public hospital system. Aside from the Northern Territory, we have the highest utilisation of the public hospital system in the country, despite having the highest level of private health insurance in the country. Even though people have the option to go to the private system, they choose to come to the public system. That is reflected in the reports that Mr Mulcahy talked about.

As I have said a couple of times in the Assembly recently, waiting times in the emergency department are improving. Data from the December quarter show that 81 per cent of category 2 patients were seen on time, against a national target of 80 per cent. This compares with 77 per cent this time last year and 67 per cent for that quarter of the year before. Some 55 per cent of category 3 patients were seen on time in the December 2007 quarter against a national target of 75 per cent. That is up from 46 per cent for that quarter in the year before. Some 56 per cent of category 4 patients were seen on time in the December 2007 quarter compared with 51 per cent for the same quarter last year. Our category 1 patients are always seen on time; that is 100 per

cent. Some 83 per cent of category 5 patients were seen on time, which is above the national target of 70 per cent.

This is what I am saying: we are seeing improvements. These have been as a result of staff delivering gains through the access improvement program. There has been the introduction of the fast track service; the commissioning of a registrar review clinic; and the provision of a triage nurse in the waiting area. And there has been the establishment of the medical assessment and planning unit, known as MAPU, which gets older patients, in particular, out of the emergency department—the ones who have normally stayed much longer because of their complex needs. That frees up the ED for others in need.

In relation to elective surgery, last year 9,310 elective surgery operations were delivered. That was 1,649 more than in the first year of our government. Over the last five years, the additional funding we have put in has enabled more than 5,000 people to access elective surgery who would not have been able to do so if we had not invested in those additional services.

The government has no control over the waiting lists for elective surgery. Doctors place people on waiting lists. The only thing the government can do to improve waiting times for people is to make sure that we are delivering as much elective surgery as we can. That requires funding by the government. In every budget, we have provided that funding. We have commissioned the 10th operating theatre at Canberra Hospital, which means that all our operating theatres are in full use. They operate for extended hours. They can be used at the weekend.

From our recent negotiations with the commonwealth government, we received \$2.5 million for extra elective surgery. The reason we got only \$2.5 million was recognition that the ACT government had invested so many resources and so much extra work in elective surgery that, based on our current infrastructure, we would not be able to deliver any more. That is because all our theatres, all our staff and all our doctors are working 100 per cent in terms of delivering elective surgery.

Let me go to emergency surgery for a moment. Over the 2006-07 year, emergency surgery at public hospitals increased by 11 per cent—over the two years 2006 and 2007. With emergency surgery increasing by 11 per cent—just think about that in terms of the sheer numbers of procedures performed—that would normally come at the cost of elective surgery; there would be absolutely no way that you could take on board an 11 per cent growth in emergency surgery and keep your elective surgery going. But because we have our 10 theatres operating at TCH, we have all of the theatres at Calvary operating and we have doctors and theatre staff who are prepared to work at weekends and for extended hours, we have been able to maintain our target for elective surgery. This year we aim to reach 9,600-odd procedures. That is based on the resources that we have put in and also on the commitment of staff to make sure that our elective surgery does not come at the cost of emergency surgery, which has happened in the past. Our hospital initiated postponement of elective surgery has considerably reduced, and that is a direct result of us being able to maintain that elective capacity.

The government is happy to support Mr Mulcahy's motion, with an amendment which notes that the ROGS data is 18 months old. We are expecting to see improvements in all of those areas.

I do not accept that the public health system is in a dire situation. There are areas of pressure, but, as I said yesterday, in terms of the outcomes, in terms of the quality of treatment that is provided across the public health system, we rival any hospital in this country and certainly any hospital in the world.

We acknowledge that our community is ageing faster than other communities around Australia. We acknowledge that it is not just a matter of putting 20 beds here and 20 beds there in terms of extending our capacity. We have been looking at this over the past three years.

The capital projects that we have been funding are all about increasing our capacity. We have been looking at capacity in the intensive care unit at Calvary and the intensive care unit at the Canberra Hospital. We have opened a non-acute facility. We are in the planning stages for the psychiatric precinct.

We have replaced the 114 beds that were taken out by the previous government—and we have not only replaced those 114 beds but added more. All the data show that those cuts were made under the previous government. We have been behind in terms of trying to get back to where we should be. We have invested in another 147 beds. There are more beds coming on board this year. But we needed to ask—and I asked this question early last year—what you do when your hospitals cannot just keep tacking on 20 beds here and taking over the administration space that filled the hospital when those 114 beds were cut. We have removed admin staff; we have put the beds back in; we have opened new wards. What happens when we fill the wards that are currently vacant? What happens then?

That question led to quite a considerable piece of work being undertaken by ACT Health. In the second appropriation last year, there was \$1.2 million to fund this work. I was very surprised not to receive any questions from anybody over that \$1.2 million. It was the single largest initiative of the second appropriation and there was not one question about what it was for. I was expecting the opposition to question an allocation of \$1.2 million, but they did not. So I did not have the opportunity to inform the Assembly at that time, through the normal processes, about what that work was undertaking.

That work I asked for was a complete assessment—from community health clinics to all community health provided in the home and both the public hospitals—about our future growth needs, not just for this year or next year but by the time the big tsunami of health demands hits our community. What will we need to be ready for it? In other jurisdictions where there are now considerable pressures on their hospitals, those questions may not have been asked at the right time. That question was asked.

Enormous amounts of work have been done in the short term. I am yet to get the final report on the capital asset development plan; I am expecting it at the end of March.

That work will inform the government—and it will inform the community—on the health system infrastructure needs right up to 2022, when we know we will have hit our peak in terms of health demand. We need to be prepared for it. The interim report provided to me was that the hospital service capacity will need to grow by about 60 per cent by 2022. The major drivers of the growth will be increased demand for emergency department, intensive care, inpatient, rehabilitation, palliative care and cancer services.

We were lucky that whoever chose to build the Canberra Hospital and Calvary Hospital on those blocks of land made the right decision. The work has shown that you could not have two better located hospitals than in the north and the south of Canberra, near major roads and near residential communities.

We also need to plan a health facility for the future that takes into account improvements in technology and the changing needs of the workforce. The traditional workforce of doctor and nurse will not be able to meet the health demands of the future. We will need to look at how those professions are designed and how we use other professions to support us in delivering health care.

The report also looks at how hospital rooms should be established—at the most optimum way of looking after patients in hospital and the optimum way of having nurses and hospital staff care for those people.

There will be a massive revolution in e-health over the next few years. Australia is behind other countries in terms of e-health technology. At the moment health ministers are working on a national strategy for e-health. We need national cooperation. There is no point in setting up an e-health system in the ACT that will not work in Queensland; that just does not cut it. We need a national approach to this.

Over the next 10 to 15 years, there will be a massive revolution in how people are treated in hospital. If we rebuild Canberra Hospital and significantly redevelop Calvary Hospital, we need to make sure that we build them in a way that will allow the use of those technologies into the future.

There are a lot of different elements in this plan. It is not about short-term electoral gain; it is about making sure that in 2020 the health system in Canberra gives people the services they need and the beds they need. It will be extraordinarily expensive. We are talking about hundreds of millions of dollars but we are talking about a 10 to 15-year period.

Once the report is given to me, I am happy to come back and provide the Assembly with full details of it. I will need to talk to the community about it, because this is something that needs community discussion. Many of the health stakeholder groups have been involved in discussions around future needs, but once I get that report I need to go out to the community and talk further with them about what it says. Hopefully—maybe—we will get a unanimous Assembly view on this work. It is important. It is not political; it is not electoral. It is just what we need for our community in terms of health services.

We have an excellent health service here. Yes, people sometimes wait too long. The quality of our treatment is fantastic. We are not running an inefficient system. Our costs are coming down despite significant increases in demand. Every year, demand for our services in the hospital has grown by six per cent—double what was predicted. We budgeted for and were expecting three per cent growth in inpatient activity a year; we have had six per cent every year. But, even though we are growing at six per cent, our overall costs are coming down. We are not running an inefficient system.

We need to do more around this. The managers at the Canberra Hospital and the Calvary Hospital and in ACT Health are excellent. They are focused on the job. They are determined to make sure that we are prepared for the health tsunami that will hit us. It will hit us before 2020. Hopefully, the Assembly will get behind a plan that is only and simply about providing adequate health care and adequate services for the people of the ACT. I move:

Omit paragraph (1), substitute:

“(1) notes:

- (a) the recent State of Government Services report by the Productivity Commission; and
- (b) although the ACT continues to experience above-average waits in some areas, the ACT Government is investing considerable resources and programs into delivering record levels of elective surgery and improving waiting times for patients in the emergency department;”.

MRS BURKE (Molonglo) (11.16): I will be talking cognately to the amendment and the motion as a whole. Mr Speaker, to a large extent this motion certainly might be seen as a Johnny-come-lately, me-too approach, but I welcome any opportunity to debate our health system, particularly, our hospital system, and to discuss solutions to fix what I see as major systemic failures. I have said that on the public record many, many times in this place and outside of this place, and that is also backed up by the Chief Minister who says that there are systemic failures we need to address.

Given that, the motion before us is somewhat narrow. I think perhaps that is a reflection of the lack of knowledge in this area by the mover of the motion, as it fails to deal with what many view as the substantive issues. The Canberra community are very interested in the grassroots problems it faces rather than some grand plan for the future. Of course that is important, and I have never, as the *Canberra Times* has said, been dismissive about it, but I actually have an alternative view. Planning for the future is important—nobody would deny that. However, it is the here and now—the reports that we are getting as the opposition—that is really impacting people out there.

On that basis, there are a number of basic issues that need to be highlighted with regard to responding to this motion. The first, of course, is funding. No longer can the health minister plead a lack of funding as a reason for poor public health outcomes. This government, of its own volition, is the highest spending government with regard to the ACT health system in the history of ACT self-government. Let us look for one

moment at GST. The returns on GST are at record levels since 2001. Even on the back of a billion-dollar boom, we still struggle to keep up with demand placed on the system.

Mr Speaker, the Stanhope government can no longer play politics with the health portfolio and blame the federal government for a lack of funding, resources and policy guidance directed towards the ACT. It is now up to this health minister to play just as hard with her ALP federal colleagues as she did with the previous federal government. However, many do not see this happening in quite as robust a way as we might want. It is not good enough for the minister to smooch up to the federal health minister, Nicola Roxon. Some commentators argue that we are seeing cracks already developing in that relationship, which is fairly sad. Only time will tell whether Ms Gallagher will, indeed, place the ACT health system above the demands of her ALP comrades.

It is, however, very concerning that with a record health budget we still have evidence of systemic failure in a number of key areas. It is worthy of note that this motion is incorrect, and I think the minister quite rightly alluded to that. It is incorrect in its reliance on figures from the Productivity Commission report. We must remember that they are from 2005-06. I would agree with the minister there. However, more recent information received under freedom of information does show that, sadly, the situation has not vastly improved. The minister concedes that, as she did on radio station 2CC this morning. She says that we continue to lag behind the rest of the country on elective surgery and emergency department wait times with the feeling that more improvement is needed. She does acknowledge that, and she stands here today to say that.

We cannot rely on old information, but the information that I have is more up to date, and obviously the minister has even more recent information. It is really important that we are given as up-to-date information as possible by the minister. If she does have that up-to-date information in full, I would ask that she table that today. I have said it before that the minister does tend to be in denial over the situation at our Canberra public hospitals, particularly. In doing that, of course, she does our valiant front-line nursing staff, doctors, specialists and so forth a real disservice.

We talked about basic issues. It is very concerning, as I have said, with the massive health budget that we have of some \$801 million that we still cannot seem to get this right, even knowing what we did probably five years ago that the demands and needs placed on us as of today would be coming. It is not like this happened overnight. I have talked about the discharge planning process, for example, which is appalling. That is an issue raised with me by nurses, doctors and patients alike on many occasions.

We all hear in this place that nurses are working double shifts due to lack of staffing and that they continue to work under pressure every day they are at work. Patients are being sent home with insufficient supplies. As a result, the minister seems unaware—she was yesterday in question time—of a key New Zealand and Australian working party which is working tirelessly in regard to the VT and DVT issue. That was something that we asked about yesterday. I am very concerned about a clipping from

the *Sydney Morning Herald* of 23 February written by Richard Macey entitled “Idle reactor keeps sick waiting for treatment”, which states:

A doctor specialising in nuclear medicine, who asked not to be named, described the problems caused by delays in getting radiopharmaceuticals as “significant”.

“We have had to prioritise who needs a scan urgently.”

Delays, for example, could force the postponement of the chemotherapy for cancer patients who first needed a heart scan to ensure they could cope with the treatment.

“We are supposed to be a first world nation, not a third world one.”

That is something else the minister is in denial about. She says I make these things up. I certainly do not; it is other people who say that. It is their view, not necessarily my view, that counts.

Ms Gallagher: You think it’s a third world system, do you, Jacqui?

MRS BURKE: If the minister is not listening to the people who are speaking, then she is denying them and she is in denial herself. The minister announced a delivery of a new MRI machine, but the day after was unaware, as I have just said, of concerns surrounding a lack of radiopharmaceutical supplies due to the Lucas Heights reactor being shut down last August.

Plastic surgeons in Canberra have now made the decision not to undertake key work considering it too high risk, simply because this minister failed to act on key problems I raised in this place last year. Family members of a chemotherapy patient had to go on television not once but twice to obtain justice from a system that failed their father, even though the minister promised to include them in a clinical review. Then she had the audacity to proceed to blame the family because they did not contact her. If the system is working well, why do whole families have to go on television and complain before the minister acts? Why do nurses and surgeons and doctors continue to contact my office and other members of the opposition regarding the fact that they are not being listened to?

I add at this point that I will continue to work with the Health Services Commissioner. The minister clearly does not want to hear anything I have to say and does not believe anything I say, so I will continue to work with the commissioner. She will get my next report in due course.

All of this points to one thing—systemic management and ministerial failure. The opposition has already put forward a situation, for example, for better management practices in relation to the establishment of hospital boards, which the mover of this motion, Mr Mulcahy, alluded to this morning. Our front-line staff do an amazing job, but, more than ever before, they need a minister who will do more to stand up for them and stop the covering up of serious issues. I was told that by a nurse yesterday. She is very, very disappointed.

Ms Gallagher: What do you mean?

MRS BURKE: I raise these issues on behalf of people in the community, and the minister then goes into denial and says it is not happening. I do not think she realises the impact that is having on people out there. The hospital system does require direction and leadership, Mr Speaker, and it is now increasingly evident that this health minister is not up to the job and not in control of ACT Health.

The minister announced another Monday plan some weeks ago. The minister said this new plan would cost hundreds of millions of dollars. Where are the costings for this new revolution? What will be the cost for preliminary consultation, for example, and feasibility? More importantly, why should Canberrans be asked to even take this seriously when they still wait months for key elective surgery and then endure excessively long waiting periods in our emergency departments?

Just going back a step, I refer to something the minister said this morning. She said the government will not be able to agree to everything Mr Mulcahy has raised, and she claimed she attempts to work with the Assembly wherever she can. It is interesting that when this plan was raised no actual figure of any money was attached to it whatsoever, not even a statement that it will cost \$5 million for a feasibility study. It is just out there in the ether as a plan that was presented on a Monday morning to cover up the serious issues that we continue to experience in this town.

Frankly, Mr Speaker, we do need time frames for outcomes. We need to know budgets for what is happening. We need the time frames released and the money attached. Reporting for the sake of reporting is unacceptable and not good enough. The minister must now stake her claim and hold herself and her department accountable. In conclusion, Mr Speaker, how much more time are Canberrans prepared to give this minister and this Chief Minister to fix the most basic of health issues?

DR FOSKEY (Molonglo) (11.26): I will be supporting Mr Mulcahy's motion today. It is very important that we do discuss in the Assembly this issue, because it is the issue, as we well know, that is the major concern of most people living in the ACT. It is one that few of us can avoid encountering in our day-to-day lives either for ourselves or for the people that we care about. The issue of whether our health system is working matters a great deal.

It is surprising that the healthiest and the wealthiest jurisdiction has the worst waiting times in the country for elective surgery and treatment in emergency departments. I am well aware that I, like everyone else, am using statistics from 2005 and 2006, and I do appreciate that that is a limitation. I can only hope, along with the government, that the next such close-up view shows us that there has been an improvement.

It is always concerning to me when you ask governments whether they are doing something they always tell you how much they are spending as though that is a response in itself. We know that you can throw buckets and buckets of money at something, but if the systemic problems are not addressed then those buckets of money will not really make a lot of difference. To spend the money is important, but to spend the money in the right places and in the right ways is more important.

I was pleased that I gained a much greater understanding of the way the system works as a result of the public accounts committee's inquiry into the Auditor-General's report on waiting lists in hospitals. It was very interesting to go to other jurisdictions and to see how they deal with those problems. Some of those lessons could be translated to the ACT. Indeed, I was quite pleased to see that the government did institute some changes in the way it deals with waiting lists as a result of the Auditor-General's report and perhaps, to some extent, as a result of the committee's inquiry into the Auditor-General's report.

I think that we can only hope now that a better partnership results between the Rudd government through the new health minister, Nicola Roxon, and the states and territories. I suppose we have the best possible scenario for cooperation between the states and territories where there is nothing to be gained from the commonwealth government passing the problem over to the states and saying, "Oh well, they are doing a bad job because they are Labor governments." We now have wall-to-wall Labor governments, and if that does not translate into better efficiencies and better cooperation then the electorate will need to think again and the Labor Party will need to think again about the way it works together.

One of the best ways for the Australian government to assist us is to increase the funding for local bulk-billing GPs. We have a shortage of general practitioners in Canberra. A *Canberra Times* article of 13 October indicated that we were about 60 GPs short. How does this translate? We all know that our local, family, personal doctor is one of the most crucial factors in us achieving good health outcomes. I have lived in Canberra for well over 20 years now, and I have to say that it is only in the last few years that I have had a doctor that I believe is my doctor, who knows me and knows my daughter. Earlier than that I did attend a practice but generally had to see a different doctor every time.

I think the ideal outcome for people is that they have a medical practitioner who knows their case history over time and holistically. For some people, that can be a naturopath; for some people it can be an osteopath. It depends on their own indications and their own preferences, but that personal knowledge of one's health history is really important. We know that in Canberra many GPs have closed their books to new patients. Some GPs who have specialisations that are well known are not able to take new patients, even if, for instance, one wishes to have a skin complaint checked out and only some GPs have access to that.

What we are finding is that people's conditions can worsen, it becomes an emergency and—hey presto—they are in the queue increasing waiting times at the emergency department. It is health services at the local level, in the suburbs, GPs who are handy to people, understanding that a lot of people can only access health services locally, that are important. That is one of the ways that we need to deal with it. To have two hospitals, one in the north and one in the south is excellent, but to have the local services handy is really crucial.

We know that with our ageing population there will be a big increase in demand for services and in particular kinds of services. At the same time we must not neglect our

children and our young people, because that is where it is important to identify health issues early so that they can either be addressed or the proper treatment given so that problems are not exacerbated over time.

We have heard that there are massive changes afoot in health. On 10 February the health minister was quoted as saying that Calvary Hospital's facilities would be enhanced and Canberra Hospital would be given a major redevelopment under the long-term plan. I think we need to see this long-term plan. The long-term plan needs to be opened to public scrutiny at an earlier rather than later stage when it is fully complete and handed to us as a polished item. It is very difficult for consultation to occur in those circumstances. People are vitally interested in health, and there will be useful things to say about it out in the community. It may result in efficiencies, and it is well worth while with such an important investment that affects the whole community.

I would be interested in hearing from Ms Gallagher as to when she does plan to release her health plan. If we are asking for time lines, we need to know exactly what is the aim of the health plan and what it is expected to achieve. I am also interested in, instead of just talking about large hospitals getting larger, looking at different ways and more flexible ways we can deliver the pointy end of services. There is plenty of evidence around that shows that smaller, specialised hospitals or health services can work better. We certainly know that a major strep outbreak in a large hospital is more of a problem than it is in a smaller hospital. We are looking at the development of bacteria and viruses that are much more resistant to any approach that we might take. Therefore I think we need to get smart about these things. I support the motion; I call for more information about the ACT Government's health plan, and let us see some more effort put at the local level and into primary health care services.

MS MacDONALD (Brindabella) (11.35): I will also address both the motion and the amendment in the same speech. Before I go into my speech, however, I will address a couple of points that were raised by both Mrs Burke and Dr Foskey in their speeches. Mrs Burke was saying that we had not put in money for the plan, but I understand that we have put in \$1.2 million in the second appropriation for planning the CADP. Dr Foskey was making comments about problems with getting to see a GP and the fact that you need to have somebody who provides that continuity of care for your general health, and I do not disagree with those comments. But I would point out that this is a federal matter, and even though it is a federal matter, this government has certainly been doing all that it can to actually deal with the issue. I know that I have had conversations with friends and they have trouble getting into GPs as GPs have closed off their books.

We have actually put funds in through the division of general practitioners to undertake marketing work to attract GPs to Canberra. I also understand that the health minister has regularly written to the federal government requesting that all of the ACT be declared a workforce shortage area for general practitioners, and we will continue to do those things. Hopefully, the situation will now change and there will be some recognition that there is a problem. Previously there was no recognition by the former federal government that there was a problem within the ACT. I am sure that all of us can recite experiences of speaking to people that we know who are within the ACT

and who have had troubles getting in to see a general practitioner. The other day I rang to make an appointment with my general practitioner with whom I had developed a relationship. Unfortunately, she has moved to Byron Bay.

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: A sea change, Ms MacDonald.

MS MacDONALD: Yes, absolutely. We do not have the beach here, as my husband keeps pointing out to me.

I would also like to thank Mr Mulcahy for bringing on this motion. This government has done more than any other in the history of self-government in terms of additional investment into the public health system. Besides the general increase in funding for inflation and wage outcomes, the additional funding provided for our health services has been targeted to meet the government's strategic objectives, which are aimed at improving access to services as well as continuing to improve the quality of those services. The government has also funded a range of initiatives which provide the community with additional options for care as well as projects and programs which improve the way care is provided.

I would like to address each of Mr Mulcahy's dot points, and the first one relates to waiting times for care. As the minister said, the ACT has the second highest public hospital utilisation rate in the nation. In the latest information published in the AIHW for the 2005-06 year, our public hospitals managed 238.4 separations per 1,000 population. That is almost 12 per cent above the national average. However, the total utilisation rate for hospital services in the ACT, that is both public and private hospital services, is the same as the national average.

Perhaps more tellingly, the level of utilisation of elective surgery at ACT public hospitals was 30 per 1,000 population in 2005-06, 13 per cent above the national average of 26 per 1,000 population. So a greater proportion of ACT residents who need elective surgery choose to be treated in the public hospital system than in private hospitals. Why, is the question that must be asked. I would suggest that is because they are confident that their public hospital system provides them with a high quality of health care. They recognise the excellence that our public system provides.

Mr Mulcahy's motion refers specifically to waiting times in the emergency department. I, like all those who have been interested in the health care system, recognise a major barrier to improving waiting times for emergency department care is access to suitably qualified emergency department physicians. Across the world health systems are trying to develop ways of attracting more doctors for their emergency departments. This is not a problem confined to within the borders of the ACT. However, even here we are seeing real signs of success. I understand that over recent months ACT Health has recruited an additional two specialist physicians for the emergency department at Canberra Hospital with another specialist to arrive in the near future. This access to additional emergency department specialists will also improve access to services.

Moving on to waiting times for elective surgery where the broad statistics do not provide enough information on positive improvements already made in this area, we

should not forget the ACT's excellent record in providing surgery for patients in need of urgent elective surgery. For the first half of 2006-07, 94 per cent of all people classified as urgent elective surgery cases—that is, people who should receive surgery within 30 days of listing—were admitted to hospital within the standard time frame. This is an excellent result and continues to be among the best in the nation. Mr Deputy Speaker, I move now to—

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: Just a moment, Ms MacDonald. Mr Hargreaves, is there a difficulty out there?

Mr Hargreaves: Yes there is, Mr Deputy Speaker. I understand the rules—

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: Could I ask the gentleman up in the press box who is not a member of the press to depart the press box. Thank you very much. Ms MacDonald, carry on.

MS MacDONALD: Thank you. As to Mr Mulcahy's second dot point and his recognition of the significant announcement made by the health minister last month, the government has recognised the need to provide certainty for the operational health budget into the future, including the need to focus on the considerable capital requirements of the system into the future.

We cannot meet this level of demand within our current capacity of our hospitals infrastructure, and that is why the Stanhope government has taken steps to research, plan and consult on a vision for the future. Some opposite like to make statements about the need for adding beds to the hospital system while conveniently forgetting that it was their side of politics that ripped out over 100 beds from our system.

I refer members to the annual reports on hospital statistics published in the AIHW. When those on the other side came to office in 1995-96 our public hospitals reported an average of 780 available beds. In 2001-02 when they lost office, the AIHW reported that our public hospital system had 110 fewer beds available, or 670 in total. In 2006-07 our hospitals reported an average of 785 available beds. Over the last six budgets, we have more than put back the number of beds that were stripped by the previous government, and the funding provided in the 2007-08 budget, plus the full-year impact of the additional beds provided in 2006-07, will push our hospital system capacity to over 800 beds this year.

The initial vision of ACT Health's capital asset and development plan, or CADP, provides the blueprint from which we can now develop the plan for the future of our health system. The plan is a testament to the commitment and professionalism of those who manage, plan and run our public health system.

Mrs Burke has on many occasions made statements that show why she should never be this territory's minister for health. Mrs Burke castigates the government for having the gall to ensure that our public health system will have the capacity to meet the health needs of the community into the future. She is having a go at this government for ensuring that we will be able to meet the needs of the community into the future.

Mrs Burke has also stated in relation to the government's plan for the future of our health infrastructure that we do not need spaceships and brainwaves. The development of new types of operating theatres and state-of-the-art neurosurgery services, I would suggest, is not something that we should be making jokes about.

What is the alternative that Mrs Burke is proposing? Let us open 100 beds and that will fix everything for now and ever more—I do not think so. She has no ideas about where the beds should be or what type of beds are needed, no ideas about the new ways to provide services that provide better outcomes for patients and no comments about the adoption of emerging technology to improve services and patient safety.

In relation to the final point of Mr Mulcahy's motion, the minister has already detailed that this a far-reaching vision and one that still has some consultation to come and calls on facilities to be ready for a peak in demand by 2020. That sort of timetable reinforces this government's desire to plan not for the next election or the next leadership spell on the other side but for a health system that will benefit and serve all Canberrans for the next 20 years. Mr Deputy Speaker, we do not want to put in place short-term facilities will not stand up to the test of time, facilities like Quamby or the PSU. We are making a plan that will deliver for the people of the ACT.

MR MULCAHY (Molonglo) (11.45): I will just be brief on these matters. You can have these debates about statistics. I know members pick different sets of statistics to justify the position they adopt in this place. The minister continues to put a lot of focus on the answer to reducing waiting times as being more funding. But the point I continue to make is that we must also be looking at efficiency gains.

There have been some changes in relation to the utilisation of theatre, but there are also industrial reforms there that might more accurately mirror what goes on at John James. Unless I am out of touch with some recent changes, there was still a significant advantage being enjoyed by John James in relation to utilisation of their surgeries as opposed to the Canberra Hospital. It all points to the fact that there are many areas in which you can increase efficiency. The answer is not always just money.

I knew it would be only a matter of weeks before the new federal government would embrace the Treasury approach to dealing with state governments and territory governments, and that is to use that magical word "no". We have seen it happen accordingly. I think, rather naively, the state Labor governments thought that they would go off and meet with the commonwealth and they would just get a tick. Of course, we are seeing that life is not as simple as it was first thought. I am sure we are going to see the same thing with technical education and general education and a host of other things where the commonwealth has its hands on the much sought after cheque book.

The data, which I have cited, does contradict the minister's view that Canberra Hospital rivals any other hospital in Australia. But I would also reject the rather foolish notion put forward by Mrs Burke that we are somehow living in a third world country. I do not know where Mrs Burke has travelled to, but she might want to undertake a study tour of somewhere such as a third world country and she will soon

know what poor standards of health care are all about. It is very unfair on everybody involved in health in the ACT to use such outrageous descriptors as to refer to the ACT health standards as being reflective of third world health.

It is absolute nonsense that gets into the public's mind and that panics people when they have to turn up with their children or a senior parent who needs emergency care and they hear those sort of messages. That reflects terribly badly on the staff. Of course, in the ultimate instance, it reflects very badly on the member for saying those sorts of things in this place. I would hope that the opposition leader would counsel her about the foolishness of making such stupid, extreme assessments about our health system.

The minister made light of the fact that the use of services are growing at six per cent but it was only predicted there would be a three per cent growth. We were not treated to any explanation as to why the predictions and the forecasts utilised were so off the money. It is very important to get these projections right. People in the field of health care certainly would not subscribe to a three per cent growth in direction, and we have to be realistic in our forecasts. Obviously the challenge becomes how you fund those anticipated levels in growth in demand for services.

There has also been some fair mention by the minister and Ms MacDonald over the issue of utilisation. The fact is that there are more people utilising the services, but that, in itself, is not a simple defence for why we are under pressure. One has to look at the factors, and Dr Foskey made some reference to issues related to GPs. I do not actually think the territory government is the one that is responsible for that problem. I think the problem was created about 28 years ago in the commonwealth when they decided to get a bit clever about reducing a number of medical school places. Doctors tell me this and I believe them. We are now paying a very heavy price in terms of the lack of GPs in our community.

Other issues have arisen—the sea change model, the issues of liability, people want more leisure time—but we do, in fact, as a country, have ourselves nationally to blame for having created this problem, and it will take years to rectify it. It will take more people in medical schools now, and we will need to accept the fact that there are going to be difficulties for decades as a consequence of this lack of vision and poor planning at the commonwealth level in terms of funding for places in medical schools. That is one factor that is contributing to utilisation.

Another factor is the fact that people just like to save money. If you go down to the Phillip medical centre, you will see the place overflowing into the streets, and I think there are 12 or 18 doctors down there. If you can get bulk-billing, people go for that option. I do not think people always go there because they cannot afford to pay more; I think it suits people. But that does put pressure on services, and the temptation is to use the hospital facilities in circumstances that may not always warrant emergency care. You cannot make that decision here and now, and it is certainly not a position that is easily addressed in my view.

A couple of other points: I am sorry Mrs Burke has bolted in the middle of this debate because she was fairly forthright in her patronising approach to my remarks. She said

it was a case of Johnny-come-lately. I did not see a comment from Mrs Burke for about a week after the Productivity Commission report came out. We had it analysed the moment it arrived and made public comment, but she says my figures were wrong in terms of the waiting list for elective surgery. This 2008 report on government services was released on 31 January this year, so we are talking about four or five weeks ago. The data probably is 18 months old, and the minister tells us that things are getting better now. But for Mrs Burke to say it is all wrong and incorrect suggests that she is either not on top of the game or is just simply in the business of scoring a few points. I will look forward to her correcting that on the record, just like Mr Pratt apologised for being at Jim Murphy's dinner at his local branch the other night. There is nothing wrong with apologising for mistakes you make, and I am sure Mrs Burke can do the same.

In terms of the issue of the size of hospital, Dr Foskey spoke about that and she spoke about the time lines. I would like to see time lines spelled out. The minister's amendment does not trouble me unduly. I can understand the sensitivity about putting in a comment about our emergency and elective surgery times being the worst in the country, but her amendment does acknowledge that data which is in the report. It is a fair comment that we are at record levels of elective surgery. There are improvements in the emergency department waiting times, but we are a long way from perfect. I am glad that the other elements of the motion, particularly the last section about reporting here with proper time lines, is accepted. I hope that the minister will give action to that resolution and actually present us with a timetable and a more detailed report. I understood from her remarks that that would happen.

As I said, Dr Foskey spoke on the size of hospitals. Hospitals are a bit like schools—nobody really likes to be in a school that has a massive number of pupils where the sense of the individual is lost. The bottom line is that the cost of running of hospitals is such that small hospitals are economically disastrous. I hear the issue about infection control. That is not an easy problem to deal with, but small, boutique hospitals are not a good idea. I grew up in Tasmania and at every election a new hospital would be opened in a country town. We saw one they tried to preserve in the last federal election, but all around Tasmania are these hospitals which are probably equipped to do little more than put a bandaid on anything. But they won votes in those communities.

With the capital cost of health care, the salaries involved and the difficulty in attracting skilled people, multiple hospital locations make no sense in a city of this size. Where you can drive from one end of the city to the other, I am afraid having small, boutique hospitals does not make much sense, unless you are looking for the pampering that might come with some form of hospital confinement for non-major matters. That certainly should not be the responsibility of the taxpayer. I know the government has ruled out a third hospital, and I think that is smart. That is about the extent of my comments on that. I will leave it at that point, Mr Speaker.

Amendment agreed to.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Federal funding cuts

MR SESELJA (Molonglo—Leader of the Opposition) (11.56): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) the actions already taken and the announced intentions of the Rudd Labor Government to slash funding for Federal Government departments and programs;
- (b) the direct and potential impact of these funding cuts in the ACT's economy including lost Australian Public Service jobs;
- (c) reduced services, projects and programs at national institutions such as the National Capital Authority, the Australian National Museum, the National Gallery of Australia and the Australian War Memorial; and
- (d) the Chief Minister's statement, made at the ACT Budget breakfast on 6 June 2007 that "We are susceptible as a small jurisdiction in that we don't have our destiny entirely in our hands ... Decisions that the Federal Government might make, particularly if there is a change of Government, could have significant impacts on employment levels or construction activity and our budget would suffer immediately"; and

(2) calls on the ACT Government to detail what it has done since the Rudd Labor Government came to office and what it will do to counter the impact of the Federal Government cuts promised or already actioned.

This motion is about the cuts that have been announced by the newly elected Rudd Labor government and the cuts that are to come, in particular the cuts as they apply to Canberra and the people of the ACT. I will address the various parts of the motion.

It is worth looking at where some of the cuts will be coming from. Funding for the National Gallery will be cut by \$196,000 this year; by \$853,000 in 2008-09; by \$881,000 in 2009-10 and by \$909,000 in 2010-11. Funding for the National Library will be reduced by \$269,000 this year; by \$1.186 million in 2008-09; by \$1.192 million in 2009-10 and by \$1.196 million in 2010-11. That is a total of over \$3.8 million. Funding for the National Museum will be reduced by \$188,000 this year; by \$823,000 in 2008-09; by \$829,000 in 2009-10 and by \$836,000 in 2010-11—over \$2.6 million in total.

The recently announced cuts to the NCA essentially will gut that organisation. Thirty-three jobs will go from a total of about 87 staff. Essentially, many of the key services that have been delivered by the NCA over a period of time will be slashed. I think it is worth looking at the impact of these cuts on Canberra and also at the various responses to them. It is also worth looking at the cuts in the context of what the ALP is doing around the country. It is all well and good for them to say that they need to make savings in the context of the, I think, \$17 billion surplus at the moment,

but it does not lead them to make cuts to such important things as the ALP memorial in Queensland. Apparently the inflation risk is not so serious that a memorial at the site of the Labor Party's birthplace—at a cost of \$2.6 million—will make any difference to inflation. Apparently that outlay can be justified while 33 members of the NCA lose their jobs, key national institutions suffer job losses and programs and services are cut back.

Let us compare the way the federal government is treating the people of Canberra with the way it is treating its Labor mates and supporting memorials to itself. Slashing the budget of the NCA, in particular, will affect tourism. People will lose their jobs, and that will have a flow-on effect for the economy. Cutting iconic NCA programs will have a negative impact on Canberra. I do not think there is any other spin to put on it. We know that Australia Day Live is under threat. We know that Tropfest is potentially under threat. Access to the Carillon and Blundell's Cottage will be cut back as a result of these cuts.

It is well and good for Senator Lundy to say that these cuts are really just designed to bring about maximum attention. The reality is that when you impose cuts on an organisation that has core statutory obligations the only course open to them is to cut jobs. They will be forced to slash 33 of their 87 jobs. Senator Kate Lundy's remarks were quite disingenuous. Her attacks have been particularly offensive to the people of Canberra and those within the NCA. Her description of the NCA as a bloated organisation highlights, I think, that this is not about making savings; this is about payback. This is the payback that Senator Kate Lundy and others within the ACT Labor Party have lobbied for. They have given the incoming Rudd government the excuse to make cuts. They have opened the door for them to slash this organisation.

I will be interested to hear the Chief Minister's comments. He needs to say whether he agrees with Senator Lundy that this is a bloated organisation. Does he agree with her assessment, in which she shows absolutely no regard or concern not only for the Canberrans who will be losing their jobs as a result of these cuts but also for the impact that this will have on the broader ACT community. We know that these cuts are just the beginning. I believe that it was the Chief Minister in this place who actually suggested that this is just the beginning. In answer to a question he said:

... it needs to be borne in mind and always remembered that this cut was part of a package of \$650 million of cuts around Australia—

He goes on to say:

Well, it is only the start.

Of course, we will see further cuts, but the interesting thing will be how the ACT Labor Party actually stands up to its federal colleagues. In August 1996, the then Liberal Chief Minister criticised the Liberal federal government for cuts to Canberra. She was not afraid to stand up for Canberra and say, "Regardless of whether it is a Liberal government or a Labor government federally, these cuts are hurting our constituents, these cuts are hurting Canberra and the government should be stood up to."

But those opposite, in particular the Chief Minister and the minister for tourism, have almost been a cheer squad for the cuts. Andrew Barr on ABC radio tried to claim that the cuts to our national institutions, particularly the National Museum, were actually good for Canberra. That was Andrew Barr's claim—that these cuts would be good for the people of Canberra. He is the greatest cheerleader for the Rudd government's attempts to slash the public service in the ACT. Not even Senator Lundy went so far as to be a cheerleader for it. Andrew Barr, the minister for tourism in the ACT, the man who is meant to represent the ACT's tourism sector, the ACT's tourism industry, was cheering on the Rudd government's cuts. He was saying to Bob Debus, "Thank you very much." He was saying to Peter Garrett, "Thank you very much for the cuts," despite their very real impact on the people of Canberra.

The Chief Minister has been a bit all over the place on this. Occasionally he has expressed regret over the cuts to the Griffin Legacy and the potential negative ramifications for the ACT from the cuts to the NCA, but he has then gone on to try and justify the cuts and to try and defend them. There has been a very lukewarm opposition, if you can call it that, from the Chief Minister. He is very much sitting on the fence on this issue. I guess the people of Canberra need to ask the question: why is he sitting on the fence? Is it because he simply does not care? Is it because he has plans to move on to the federal government at some stage and he does not want to rock the boat with his Labor Party federal colleagues? That would make some sense, I suppose. If you have got plans to go and become a federal minister you would not want to upset the federal cabinet. You would not want to take on your Labor federal colleagues.

The Chief Minister might tell us why he has been lukewarm on this—why he has been sitting on the fence. I do not think there is anyone in Canberra that believes that if these cuts had been by a Liberal federal government, the Chief Minister would not have been leading the charge in opposition to the cuts. I think it is unfortunate that he is putting aside his ability to represent those people who have elected him—the people of the ACT who expect that he will stand up for them and their needs. Instead, he is kowtowing to his federal Labor colleagues.

Of course, the attitude of the ACT Labor government is best expressed by the minister for tourism, who is actually cheering on these cuts. He is actually the PR end of the ACT government in relation to these cuts. He is the person saying that these cuts are good for Canberra. I hope that the minister for tourism is able to join in this debate. Perhaps he can tell us why he thinks these cuts will be good for Canberra. He can tell us about some of his efforts to take it up to his federal colleagues.

We know that Jon Stanhope is in retirement mode. We have seen the announcements. We have seen that they have got six candidates in Brindabella and six in Ginninderra. John Hargreaves and Jon Stanhope are looking towards retirement. In the meantime, while they are still in this place it would be great if they could actually represent their constituents and take up the needs of their constituents, rather than looking to the next career or to retirement or whatever the case may be for them after the election.

It is worth comparing what Senator Kate Lundy and local Labor have been saying on this issue with what Gary Humphries and the opposition here have been doing.

Gary Humphries is organising a roundtable to try and bring people together. I understand that he has invited Peter Garrett to come to try and avoid some of these cuts. I think it is reasonable that we actually take up these issues on behalf of the people of Canberra. Gary Humphries is actually doing that, yet there is silence from Kate. Kate Lundy may have referred to it as a stupid stunt. Unfortunately, that is often the level of Senator Kate Lundy's contribution to these debates.

We do need to look at why these cuts are being made, particularly in relation to the NCA. They are far over and above any sort of reasonable efficiency savings. If they cut five positions out of the NCA, they could make an argument that this is about shaving some inefficiencies or maybe looking at some overlap. That would be reasonable. We could look at that and we could potentially support it if it was done in a targeted way. But we know that that is not what it is about. We know that the review is happening after the cuts are made. The government has announced that 33 jobs are to go in the NCA and then said that it will have a review to look at overlap and the various rights.

I was confused yesterday in the chamber when the Chief Minister was answering a question in relation to the airport. He seemed to be suggesting that he wanted the NCA to be having a greater role, that the NCA should have oversight of the airport. So, on the one hand this is all about avoiding unnecessary overlap and, on the other hand, when it comes to the airport he actually wants overlap; he wants the NCA to take a greater role. It is difficult to see, with 33 jobs cut from the NCA, where they will find the resources now to oversight the airport.

Minister Barr, the chief cheerleader for these cuts, has talked about ACT opportunities for NCA employees. That was the other positive spin that he had to put on it. He said that they are all going to come to work at ACTPLA now that they are getting the sack from the federal government. We know that most of the cuts coming in the NCA are not in the planning area. Most of them will be in the events areas. We know that we will be losing some of our significant events and we know that the contribution that the NCA makes to our community now will be limited.

We will lose some of these events and I think it is time for Jon Stanhope and the Labor Party in the ACT to get off the fence and say, "These cuts are bad. These cuts are vindictive. These cuts are a vendetta by Senator Kate Lundy." Senator Lundy has had it in for the NCA for many, many years and is quite embittered now that she has been overlooked for the ministry. This will be the legacy of Senator Kate Lundy. We need to hear from local Labor whether they support Senator Kate Lundy. Do they support her comments that this is a bloated organisation? Do they support the gutting of the NCA, with all that that entails for the people of the ACT? Do they support these 33 Canberrans losing their jobs? Do they support Canberra losing some of its key events as a result of these cuts?

These cuts have not been well thought through. They are simply a political exercise. If you want an example of why this is a political exercise, there will be a lot of cuts but they will still be able to fund the ALP memorial in Queensland. It is not always about cost. This is about revenge, and Jon Stanhope and Andrew Barr in particular need to stop cheering these cuts. They need to start standing up to their federal Labour colleagues.

MR STANHOPE (Ginninderra—Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Business and Economic Development, Minister for Indigenous Affairs, Minister for the Environment, Water and Climate Change, Minister for the Arts) (12.11): There is certainly no question that the economy is an important issue. For governments it is one of the most important issues. It is certainly an issue that the Rudd Labor government has put front and centre of its actions and deliberations over its first three months in office. The reason it has done so, as everyone in this place knows, is that on assuming government Labor federally confronted immediately the challenge of decisively and swiftly tackling the inflation bogey unleashed by the profligacy and mismanagement of the Howard-Costello regime.

It is ironic that today we see the Leader of the Opposition in this place, the leader of a party that has already pledged itself to reducing ACT government revenues by millions of dollars through precisely the same kind of actions that delivered this Howard-Costello legacy, this new shiny leader of the local Liberals condemning the Rudd government for its determination to tackle inflationary pressures created by Mr Seselja's Liberal colleagues at the federal level.

Mr Seselja: He is still cheering for them. Keep cheering, Jon.

MR STANHOPE: We will. We will get to the nub of this debate in a moment. The Liberal Party has ignored persistent warnings, 20 warnings from the Reserve Bank of Australia, over a long period of time. The Liberal Party federally, as the central plank of its campaign at the last election—and this is the nub of the issue, the cause of Mr Seselja's immediate embarrassment and his disorderly behaviour now—pledged to keep interest rates low and then blithely set about creating the very conditions that ensured that that promise would never be kept.

It is in a way quite peculiar that Mr Seselja would choose to remind this chamber and the people of Canberra today of this abysmal legacy of the Liberal Party. Twenty-four hours ago the Reserve Bank announced another 0.25 percentage point rise in the cash interest rate, from seven per cent to 7.25 per cent. That rise takes the cash interest rate rise to a 12-year high. Did we hear Mr Seselja comment in his diatribe on the implications of a 7.25 per cent cash interest rate—a 12-year high and the twelfth interest rate rise in the last four years? Did Mr Seselja actually talk about the legacy for Canberra and Canberra families of that 12-year high in interest rates? Of course we did not.

Mr Seselja has the naivety to stand here today and condemn a government that seeks to ameliorate the dire and dreadful effect of those interest rate rises on young families and working Canberrans. We see no attempt at all today by Mr Seselja to comment on or come to grips or engage with the implications of those 12 rate rises on young Canberra families, people within Canberra in housing stress who face the prospect of eviction as a result of their inability to meet their mortgage payments. What sympathy or understanding did we see from Mr Seselja today for those Canberra families battling now to pay their mortgages?

Yes, efficiencies forced upon our great national institutions are to be lamented. Yes, job cuts to the commonwealth public sector will disproportionately affect a city such

as ours where the commonwealth is, and always will be, the major employer as well as a major customer of local goods and services. I make no apology for being conscious of this truth or for publicly commenting on this truth. The massive cuts and redundancies made by the Liberal Party in the wake of a 1996 election are still fresh in the memories of many of us. I tend to learn from history, not to rewrite it, as those opposite seem desirous of doing today.

I also take care to represent forcefully to my federal colleagues the potential impacts of their decisions upon the fortunes of the ACT and the Canberra community. To date, I have met with and personally raised my concerns with five federal ministers, including the Prime Minister, and most recently with Minister Garrett to whom I represented the ACT government's concern at the impacts of efficiency demands being made on the national cultural institutions as recently as last Friday. I also told Minister Garrett that I understood that those efficiencies, however unpalatable, were a result of the inflationary pressures and the economic position that this government has inherited from the previous Liberal government—the bitter legacy, the bitter pill of mismanagement by the previous Liberal regime.

Let us go to that legacy for a few moments. Let us go to the Liberal Party's legacy of economic mismanagement and the impact of not addressing these issues on Canberra families, the people for whom I have a great concern. At times we have to look hard at the decisions we need to take to address the evil of those 12 interest rate rises. The Reserve Bank of Australia has now raised interest rates on eight occasions, by a full two per cent, since March 2005. There was no mention of this, of course, by Mr Seselja or the Liberal Party in addressing this particular motion today.

There have been eight interest rate rises since March 2005, raising interest rates, the cash rate, by a full two per cent. A typical Canberra mortgage holder, a young Canberra working family with an average loan here in the ACT now faces an extra \$367 per month in interest payments—an additional \$4,404 a year—since March 2005. Over the life of an average loan by a young Canberra family that additional \$4,404 a year equates to an additional \$110,000 in interest payments.

Over the last two years, as a result of the mismanagement of the Liberal Party, there have been eight interest rate rises, totalling two per cent, resulting in an additional \$4,404 a year and an additional \$110,000 over the life of an average mortgage, and the Liberal Party ignore this. In a 15-minute address by the Leader of the Opposition about the impacts of measures that the current government is taking to ameliorate the impacts of inflation—

Mrs Dunne: I raise a point of order as to relevance, Mr Speaker. This is a motion about the impact on national institutions.

MR STANHOPE: It is getting a bit close to home, is it? The Liberal Party does not care about a \$4,400 impost on young Canberra families.

MR SPEAKER: Order!

Mrs Dunne: Mr Speaker, I have the floor.

Mr Seselja: You have caused it, Jon.

MR STANHOPE: We have caused it?

Mr Seselja interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Order, Mr Seselja!

MR STANHOPE: This government has caused 20 interest rate rises! What a joke.

MR SPEAKER: Order! The Chief Minister and Leader of the Opposition will cease interjecting. I am listening to a point of order by Mrs Dunne.

Mrs Dunne: Mr Speaker, this is about relevance. This is a motion about the impact of Rudd government cuts on national institutions and for the past five minutes or so the Chief Minister has been talking essentially about housing affordability, about the rising cost of housing to young ACT families. Now, if the Chief Minister wants to have a debate about housing affordability, let him bring it on. I will be happy to engage him, but this is not the place.

MR SPEAKER: Mrs Dunne, as you are fully aware, the Chief Minister has explained how the impact of the former government has resulted in interest rate changes and how that flows into funding for the ACT. I think that is entirely relevant.

Mrs Dunne: No, Mr Speaker. On the point of order, this motion—

MR SPEAKER: Mrs Dunne, do not mischievously use the standing orders.

Mrs Dunne: Mr Speaker, I am not mischievously using the standing orders. I am going to the motion, and the motion is about national capital institutions and the effect of job losses in this place.

MR STANHOPE: It is about slashing funding.

MR SPEAKER: Order, Mr Stanhope!

Mr Seselja interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Quiet, Mr Seselja!

Mrs Dunne: And all of the slashing of funding relates to national capital institutions and the loss of jobs in the ACT. The Chief Minister has almost purposely avoided that discussion and thrust it somewhere else. It is really a matter of relevance.

MR SPEAKER: It is entirely relevant. The motion states:

(1) notes:

- (a) the actions already taken and the announced intentions of the Rudd Labor Government to slash funding for federal government departments and programs;

Mrs Dunne: Yes. How is that about housing affordability, Mr Speaker?

MR SPEAKER: Mr Stanhope is explaining the effects of interest rate rises.

MR STANHOPE: I am stunned, Mr Speaker, that neither Mr Seselja nor Mrs Dunne knows what motion Mr Seselja just moved. The motion actually deals with the slashing of funding. Of course, when we get down to why—

Mrs Dunne: Yes.

Mr Seselja: She just said that.

Mrs Dunne: Yes, national institutions. Good on you. Let us talk about slashing funding.

MR STANHOPE: No, no. Mrs Dunne said it related entirely to cultural institutions, which, quite frankly, it does not. It relates to slashing funding of departments and programs. Mrs Dunne and Mr Seselja say that that is not what the motion is about; the motion is about the cultural institutions. They are just a touch uncomfortable in a 15-minute speech around the rationale for decisions and initiatives being pursued by the federal government in relation to rampaging inflation.

Mr Seselja and Mrs Dunne and the Liberal Party in this place and federally do not want to talk about the absolute direct impact of inflation on a Canberra family with an average sized mortgage—

Mrs Dunne: Put a motion about housing affordability on the paper and we will talk about it till the cows come home. You are the person who has driven up the cost of housing in this territory.

MR SPEAKER: Order!

MR STANHOPE: This is young Canberrans with young families—working families battling to meet their mortgage and other costs who have been asked since March 2005 as a result of Liberal Party mismanagement to pay an extra \$4,404 a year on their mortgage. An extra cost of \$110,000 over the life of the mortgage is the impost that has been imposed on young Canberra families, those with average sized mortgages, as a result of the mismanagement of the economy by the Liberal Party. That is the result of eight interest rate rises over the last two years.

The Rudd federal government seeks to deal with and ameliorate the possibility of a further interest rate rise to deal with inflation to reduce this enormous additional cost that Canberra families are being asked to meet in relation to their mortgages as a result of the mismanagement of the previous government. Mr Seselja and the

Liberal Party in this place refuse to acknowledge what is at the heart of the moves that the federal government is making.

We do not like the fact that our institutions here in the ACT are being affected and we do not like the prospect of fellow Canberrans facing job cuts. But do we ignore the implications of rampaging inflation? Do we ignore the implications for our economy of a slowdown in the economy as a result of those interest rate rises? Do we ignore the implications for small business or residents of the ACT being forced to apply all their previous discretionary income to their mortgage payments with the impact that that will have on discretionary expenditure within the territory. Of course we do not ignore that. Of course we lament a cut to funding to Canberra institutions, particularly the cultural institutions. Of course we are faced with despair at the prospect of fellow Canberrans losing their jobs. But let us not lose sight of the fact that we are responding to an annual increase in an average mortgage in the ACT of \$4,404 as a result of interest rate rises over the last two years.

Mr Seselja responds blithely. He does not care about the fact that the Reserve Bank has already signalled that there will be a further interest rate rise. He does not discuss interest rate rises and the impact of inflation on the economy. Does he understand what the implications of rampaging inflation are for the ACT economy and for business in the ACT? It is dire. We need to address it. We need to stop it. We need to take the steps that need to be taken to control or cap the prospect of this ever increasing inflation and ever increasing interest rate rises.

There have been 20 interest rate rises in recent times and eight in the last two years. An average mortgage in the ACT has risen by \$4,404 a year. Mr Seselja ignores that. He does not care about the implications or the impact of an additional \$4,000 a year coming out of the disposable income of an average household to meet their mortgage payments. He does not care. He did not mention it once. He did not in his speech mention once the fact that the implication of not addressing inflation is that an average Canberra family must pay an additional \$4,000 a year. They do not mention it because they do not care. They do not care about young Canberrans. They do not understand young Canberrans. They simply do not care or understand the issue that we are seeking to address here as a nation—the implications and the impact of inflation on young families. It is dire. It is serious. It is having an enormous effect.

I seek to bring this argument back to its real focus, namely, Liberal Party mismanagement and the lack of concern by the Liberal Party about the impact on Canberra families of inflation. That is something that the Liberal Party has no desire to address. They are happy to flap around about cuts to cultural institutions because it allows them to ignore the implications of a \$4,000 a year increase in average mortgage payments by Canberra families. They do not want to discuss it because they are responsible for it. I move:

Omit all words after “That this Assembly”, substitute:

- (1) notes the actions already taken and the announced intentions of the Commonwealth Government to address as a top priority the threats presented to the national and regional economies, including the ACT, and to Canberra residents, particularly the young and working families, by rapidly increasing inflation, a bitter legacy of Liberal Party financial mismanagement; and

(2) further notes:

- (a) the impact on working families in Canberra of rising interest rates—a direct result of inflationary pressures;
- (b) the disappointing reaction by some banks to increase interest rates independent of the Reserve Bank’s official rates;
- (c) the ACT Government’s increased focus on housing affordability to assist in meeting pressures on those seeking to enter the housing market and stay in it;
- (d) the approach by the Chief Minister to the Prime Minister and other senior Federal Ministers about the disproportionate impact of announced and proposed cuts to Commonwealth Government operations on the ACT; and
- (e) the ACT Government’s planned initiative to work in partnership with the Commonwealth, the Canberra Business Council, other employer organisations and employment agencies to absorb and ameliorate possible impacts of a further reduction in staff numbers at Commonwealth Public Service agencies based in the ACT.”.

(Time expired.)

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

Sitting suspended from 12.26 to 2.30 pm.

Question time

Statement by Speaker

MR SPEAKER: Before I go to questions without notice, I will make some comment about some matters that Mr Smyth has raised with the Clerk—they have been passed on to me—in relation to a question of his which was responded to by Minister Barr.

The issues I see here are that, when I ask people to come to order and stay on the subject matter of the question, I expect them to do so. Mr Barr, I offer that as a warning. I would have been surprised, I must say, that if, in the course of the question, there were not a few barbs thrown from the opposition benches. I say to the members of the opposition: when I ask you to come to order and cease interjecting, I expect you to do so. These matters inevitably lead to some sort of disorder, which makes the management of this place a little bit more difficult.

Questions without notice

Hospitals—funding

MR SESELJA: My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, you said yesterday that the Stanhope Labor government has “a plan” for the ACT’s health system and that it has “increased the health budget by 61 per cent”. You also said that

“we have the best system in the country” and that “if you were going to get sick anywhere in the world, you would want to get sick in the ACT”.

The AMA, in its *Public hospital report card 2007*, made specific mention of the fact that, according to the *State of our public hospitals* report of the commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing 2004-07, there had been “significant deterioration in the ACT” regarding emergency department performance. In summary, the AMA report scored the ACT last in four key waiting time measurements covering elective surgery and emergency departments. It concluded that the ACT had little to show for spending that is well above the national average. Minister, which of these contradictory statements is true? Is the AMA report card a fabrication?

MS GALLAGHER: I have to say re the AMA report card and the timing of it that I think it is commonly accepted that it was part of an election campaign stunt in the lead-up to the federal election.

Opposition members interjecting—

MS GALLAGHER: We were not asked to provide information for that publication. I do not want to sit here and attack the AMA, other than to say that I think the document was designed in response to the federal election campaign that was underway at the time. I stand by the comments I made yesterday around the ACT’s public hospital system and I stand behind the claim that even those opposite, if they were to choose somewhere to get sick, would choose to get sick in the ACT and be treated here. If you look at all the data around, particularly around outcomes for patients being seen in the public health system, the outcomes in the ACT are the best in the country. They are measured by things such as the utilisation rate of the hospital system, unplanned returns to theatre and hospital-acquired infections. All of those performance measures show that we have one of the best public hospital and health systems in the country.

There are areas where we need to lift our performance, and the government has been injecting significant resources and time into improving those areas. They are in categories 3 and 4 of the emergency department—categories 1, 2 and 5 are excellent—and in some of the long waits for elective surgery patients. I have stood here since I have been minister—and I believe the minister before me did the same—and acknowledged those areas that we need to improve.

We have to look at this in the context of what we are dealing with here. In 2000-01 we were dealing with and delivering about 6,400 elective surgery procedures a year. We are dealing with and putting through this year 9,600 elective surgery procedures. We have increased our output by 3,000 a year; by the end of this year we expect that to be the case. We have commissioned extra operating theatres. We have our elective surgery system working to full capacity. There is no more we can do to increase the number of elective surgery procedures that we are delivering—there is absolutely nothing more that we can do—besides building new operating theatres, building new capacity within our hospitals and increasing our bed numbers, continuing to increase the bed numbers that were lost under the previous government—114 beds lost, 147 replaced.

Mr Smyth: Not true. Prove it.

Mrs Burke: Provide the evidence.

Mr Smyth: Prove it. It's not the evidence.

MR SPEAKER: Cease interjecting!

MS GALLAGHER: We have—

Mr Smyth: 200 lost under the previous Labor government.

MS GALLAGHER: Mr Speaker, I hear the interjections that I know I should not respond to, but there is no evidence to say that there were 200 beds lost—absolutely no evidence to support that.

Mr Smyth: Where is your evidence?

MR SPEAKER: Mr Smyth, order!

MS GALLAGHER: I will table today the following document—in fact I have it right here:

ACT public hospitals—Available beds by year—Graph and table.

This shows the dramatic decline in bed numbers between 2001 and 2002—in fact over a longer period than that. I table that document today; this copy has my annotations on it, so I will get my office to bring down a clean copy. That shows that the allegation being put to the Assembly, that there were 200 beds cut under the previous Labor government, is wrong and that all cuts—the significant cuts, 114 cuts—occurred under the previous government. We have replaced those beds and we are doing more.

We have a plan for the future, unlike those opposite. The plan is about creating capacity in the hospital system for 2020, up to 2020, when the health tsunami will hit this community. We need to be ready. We have a plan. We have been criticised by those opposite for having a plan, but time will tell that we are doing the right thing—and those opposite are doing nothing.

MR SPEAKER: A supplementary question from Mr Seselja.

MR SESELJA: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Minister, given your suggestion that the AMA report card was part of a political campaign, which part of the AMA's methodology was flawed?

MS GALLAGHER: I would suggest the fact that they did not speak to jurisdictions in putting their information together. They did not seek advice from jurisdictions. They did not reflect on what jurisdictions were doing. I would suggest from my point of view as the ACT health minister that there is one flaw, one significant flaw.

I have an excellent working relationship with the AMA in the ACT. I meet them frequently. Every six weeks I meet them to talk with them about things that can be done to improve the ACT health system. I would have to say that the ACT branch of the AMA are far more relevant to the ACT health system than the federal AMA taking part in a federal election campaign.

Housing—public

MR MULCAHY: My question is to the Minister for Housing. Minister, I have been informed by residents of Red Hill and Griffith that there are significant concerns about repeated unruly behaviour by a minority of residents in public housing complexes. Have you taken any action to protect other tenants and the surrounding community against public housing tenants in Griffith or Red Hill who consistently behave in an unruly, disruptive or illegal manner?

MR HARGREAVES: I thank Mr Mulcahy for the question. I can't respond, of course—

Mr Pratt: And you could thank me for actually writing it, Mr Hargreaves.

MR HARGREAVES: Mr Speaker, I would encourage Mr Mulcahy to continue to prevent Mr Pratt from making a fool of himself, and I know he has his work cut out for him. I can't actually respond in detail about a specific case. As you know, Mr Speaker, we do not discuss individual cases here, but I am happy to talk about individual cases with members on a case-by-case basis.

In general, around the Red Hill-Griffith area, we do recognise that there are disruptive people. I totally reject the notion that it is only public housing tenants that are disruptive people in that particular area. Unlike those opposite, the government has a range of strategies that come into play with regard to disruptive tenancies, and each of them comes into play at various stages. In all tenancy agreements it is recognised that a tenant will respect neighbours' ability to have a quiet amenity and quiet enjoyment of their area. When that does not happen, those opposite make the accusation—and I accept that Mr Mulcahy is not one of those people, by the way—that the government is responsible, as landlord, for the behaviour of these people. It should also be noted that I do not see a requirement from those opposite to hold private landlords responsible for the behaviour of their tenants.

Mrs Burke: They operate; you don't.

MR HARGREAVES: Mrs Burke can bleat all she likes; she can't get away from that. In fact, she is a bleatologist of the first order.

With respect to the processes that we bring to bear, they involve a visit to disruptive tenants by our housing managers, who do a number of things. They draw the tenants' attention to the clause in the tenancy agreement which requires them to respect the quiet amenity of those around them. It depends, of course, on the nature of the disruption. Sometimes it is noise; sometimes it is illegal behaviour. Quite often, it

reaches the stage where the police need to be brought in. I would encourage each and every person in Canberra, where they have illegal activity going on, to contact the police.

Mrs Burke: And then what?

MR HARGREAVES: Contrary to Mrs Burke's bleatings, our housing managers do not have the powers of the police. They do not have the powers of arrest, nor do they have the powers of eviction. Mrs Burke often says, "Kick them out." Do you know what happens, Mr Speaker? They come through the revolving door into homelessness services and they are then back in the system again. We try to work with those tenants to try and address their behaviour.

At the end of the day, however, we have two options. If we cannot work with these people, if it is just not working, we have a choice between two things. One of them is management-initiated transfer—and that does occur—where we will move a tenant. In some cases that actually has a positive effect on their behaviour and it does work. It does not always work: we move the problem to another part of Canberra and then we are back there again. The last resort is to put the matter before the Residential Tenancies Tribunal, which is the proper authority for eviction. The government, the minister, Housing ACT and the Commissioner for Housing do not have the power—nor should they—to order somebody from their home. We put these matters before the RTT, and on occasions they order evictions. On other occasions they do not. We are seeking additional powers for the RTT to give them the authority to have a conditional order.

Mrs Burke: So you will have the powers.

Mr Pratt: So he doesn't have the will to protect—

MR HARGREAVES: Mr Speaker, I am finding it very difficult to talk at the moment.

MR SPEAKER: Order! Mrs Burke and Mr Pratt, just as an advisory, have a look at standing order 39.

MR HARGREAVES: Mrs Burke, being a whip, should know that off by heart. But, of course, she is the worst whip this place has ever seen.

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

MR HARGREAVES: We work as much as we can with our clients to try and assist the people that Mr Mulcahy talked about.

MR SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Mulcahy?

MR MULCAHY: Yes, and I thank the minister for that answer. You may have to take this question on notice, but can you indicate on how many occasions in the last year repeated disruptive tenants have been brought before the Residential Tenancies

Tribunal, and is there a formal meeting between the police and Housing ACT to ensure your department is notified of people who are disruptive?

MR HARGREAVES: Mr Speaker, I do not think I can provide the information in the way Mr Mulcahy has described it here. I would invite Mr Mulcahy to contact my office at a time convenient, and I will have him briefed by our officers on the detail. The problem is that Housing ACT are not the only people who can apply to the Residential Tenancies Tribunal. They are also not the only people who would notify the police with respect to a given behaviour. Often we are brought in when other things have not worked, so we will not necessarily know the extent to which somebody is a repeat offender.

As I have tried to indicate, there is a chain of events which occur before we actually seek eviction. If there is illegal activity—let me be absolutely crystal clear about this—it is a police matter and they need to act and do something about it. When it comes to non-illegal activity which is disruptive, we have that chain of events. We talk about interventions with the neighbourhood and not only with individuals. We talk to individuals about alcohol and drug services, mental health services, anger management, debt counselling and a whole range of other issues. But also, when it comes to the neighbourhood around there, we actually offer mediation and conflict resolution, and our housing managers go into these areas and deliver.

I need to tell the Assembly, Mr Speaker, that we need to put this into a certain perspective. Mrs Burke is well known for going out into the media and whipping up—

MR SPEAKER: Order! This is not about Mrs Burke.

MR HARGREAVES: This is about disruptive tenants, Mr Speaker. I refer to the image of disruptive tenants being put out by members of this place. This goes to the issue that Mr Mulcahy is talking about—disruptive tenants. We have 11,500 tenancies in Housing ACT's portfolio—that is 23,000 people who are tenants within Housing ACT. Less than one per cent of those people are disruptive, and an even smaller percentage of those are the ones who are repeat offenders.

Mrs Burke: How many of the community are being affected? That's the point.

MR SPEAKER: Order, Mrs Burke!

MR HARGREAVES: Mr Speaker, this is a very small number of people within the tenancies of Housing ACT.

Mr Pratt: Where's your duty of care to the others, John?

MR HARGREAVES: God, you are a tiresome individual, you really are.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Pratt, cease interjecting.

MR HARGREAVES: A tiresome individual. Dear, oh dear, I hope I come back to this place for another four years and you are not here.

Mr Pratt: I'll send you a set of—

MR SPEAKER: Order! Come to the question. Mr Pratt, cease interjecting. That is the second time.

MR HARGREAVES: Thank you, Mr Speaker. The issue is that we have to put it in a certain perspective—it is a very low number of people. Housing ACT tries its best through a range of policies to actually address the underlying issues behind this. We have to take into account not only those particular circumstances but also the circumstances of, for example, children in a particular family who are causing trouble. We cannot just pick up a family and move them if in fact it is going to adversely affect the education of the kids, for example. There is a lot of real hard work that is done by Housing ACT officers working with the tenants and trying to work with the neighbourhood.

In a lot of our multi-unit complexes we have neighbourhood groups, for lack of a better term, and we have community rooms. Our Housing people go down and talk to people in situ. Like I say, Mr Speaker, it really depends on the nature of the behaviour as to whether or not it is something about which we will go very quickly to try and get an eviction order. One of the things that we have considered and we are moving on, subject to parliamentary counsel advice, is seeking extra powers for the RRT to issue compliance orders. At the moment we do not have compliance orders for anything—

Mrs Burke: Acceptable behaviour agreements.

MR SPEAKER: Order, Mrs Burke! I have called you to order twice.

MR HARGREAVES: We are trying to get compliance orders. At the moment the act only allows us to do compliance orders with respect to the non-payment of rent. We would like to have additional powers given to the RRT to make out compliance orders with respect to disruptive tenants and disruptive behaviour. We do not have that. There was a court case in recent times about that, which has meant that we are talking about it. We are getting GSO advice and parliamentary counsel advice to try and do something about that. At the end of the day, I would like to hear what solutions those opposite might have, other than tossing people back out onto the street.

Hospitals—staffing

MRS BURKE: My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, yesterday in question time, you stated that Canberra's public hospitals have a workforce that chooses to come and work here and that our staff rates are going up. Nurses in Canberra's public hospitals have contacted the opposition's health hotline to express their serious concerns about the daily occurrences of staff shortages and low morale at the Canberra Hospital.

Yesterday I was advised by a nurse that, in one ward at the Canberra Hospital, a note was left on the admin desk headed "URGENT—Can anyone work?" The note was asking for some 35 shifts to be covered over the weekend, and only two names appeared on the list by late Friday afternoon.

Minister, how do you reconcile these on-the-ground facts with the claims that you made yesterday in the Assembly?

MS GALLAGHER: The beauty of being in opposition means you actually do not have to understand how the health system works.

Mr Smyth: Explain it to us.

MS GALLAGHER: I will explain, because the comments I made yesterday are correct. We have more nurses in our system than we have had in the past. Right now we have more nurses. And I can give you the exact figure from December 2007.

Mr Smyth: Come on, dazzle us with your knowledge.

MS GALLAGHER: I am quite entitled to refer to the exact statistic, Mr Smyth. It is 1,207.5 full-time equivalents in December 2007 nursing and midwifery staff compared to 1,023 full-time equivalents in December 2006 which, in a year, is an extra 84.4 full-time equivalent nursing staff or an increase of 7.5 per cent.

That does not mean that, on any given day, there will not be a shortfall in shifts at the hospital. They occur for a range of reasons in a large organisation, such as sick leave, for one reason or another; training, having to go off, in terms of professional development; holidays, perhaps. Often our biggest shortages coincide with school holiday times.

We have just undergone a massive recruitment for another 60 full-time equivalent nurses. We are going through the recruitment exercise now. I understand one contingent have already started work. I understand that there are pressures, particularly for nursing staff at both of our public hospitals and particularly in making sure that, on every day, every shift has the right complement and the right mix of staff, whether it be enrolled staff, registered nurses or some of those senior nurses in those leading nurse positions.

In terms of recruitment and in terms of separation rates, that is, the myth that Mrs Burke keeps peddling that everyone is leaving the hospital in droves, it is just not true and it just does not add up. It does not add up on the figures that I have seen; it does not add up in terms of the staff that we have in place; and it does not add up in terms of the applications we get for nursing staff to come and work at the hospital.

I accept that there are pressures on every ward on every given day because of how busy the hospital is and because of the fact that we have, on any given day, nurses who are unable to do the shifts that they were allocated. That presents us with challenges. We try to meet those in terms of using overtime, and we do it in line with the certified agreement.

I cannot stand here and say that people are not choosing to work here. They simply are. They are coming here and they are staying here. We have more health professionals employed in our public hospital system than we have ever had.

MR SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Mrs Burke?

MRS BURKE: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Minister, how on earth could you claim yesterday that “we have the best system in the country”—and that is to quote you—when key front-line professional staff are constantly being asked to work double shifts and are being recalled to work extra shifts?

MS GALLAGHER: I do not apologise for the need to staff the hospital adequately. If someone rings in sick, we have to ask someone to cover their shift. I would say that, if we were not asking people to do overtime or asking them to work extra hours because we could not fill shifts, it would start to raise questions as to whether we were running a first-rate hospital. If the opposition think that it is okay to leave shifts unfilled just because we do not ask staff to do extra shifts and still deliver what we need to deliver, I would say that that would start jeopardising the reputation of the Canberra Hospital.

We do our best. Nurse managers—those people who Mrs Burke thinks are evil: managers evil, front-line staff good in the black-and-white world that Mrs Burke lives in, the only world that she can operate in—

Mrs Burke: Point of order, Mr Speaker: the minister needs to come to the question—118 (a).

MR SPEAKER: Come to the subject matter of the question.

MS GALLAGHER: I am on the subject matter. The subject matter was about filling staffing rates. I am saying that the “evil managers” who work at the Canberra Hospital—those managers whom Mrs Burke talks down, day in and day out—are the ones that work every day trying to make sure that every shift in the hospital is full and making sure that there is the right complement of staff and the right mix of staff. They are the nurse managers who try to do a very difficult job.

From time to time we cannot deliver everything and every shift is not filled. That does impact on the services that we can deliver, but they do their best and the nurses do their best. On occasion, nurses will work extra hours and overtime and will be flexible with their shifts. We are really grateful for that, because without that flexibility we would not be able to deliver the services that we deliver on a daily basis.

Environment—green waste programs

DR FOSKEY: My question is to the Minister for Territory and Municipal Services in his capacity as head waste minister.

Members interjecting—

DR FOSKEY: This is not kind. They can laugh away.

Mr Hargreaves: We have just seen the annual burst of mirth so I do not mind.

MR SPEAKER: Come to the question.

DR FOSKEY: Constituents complain that the ACT is falling behind many local governments around Australia which have successful green waste programs, including Queanbeyan and Eurobodalla in our region. I have also heard anecdotal evidence, including from someone at the landfill face, that a large part of the garbage placed in ACT garbage bins is, in fact, green waste. Could the minister please estimate the proportion of green waste going to landfill and indicate whether this is a concern?

MR HARGREAVES: A fair bit, actually.

Mrs Dunne: Fifteen per cent, Johnno.

MR HARGREAVES: Mrs Dunne informs us all that it is 15 per cent, Mr Speaker. As I absolutely trust Mrs Dunne implicitly with my life, I will take the question on notice and check her figures and report back.

I am not so sure that we ought to base our policy development on anecdotes out of the Eurobodalla shire. I think that a little bit more concrete evidence than that may drive our no waste strategy. I think our no waste strategy overall is a very good one. We are leading the country in many, many parts of our recycling, reuse and recovery. Dr Foskey does talk about green waste specifically. We do not have a pick-up at the bottom of every driveway.

Mr Barr: Give it to the policeman.

MR HARGREAVES: Give the policeman that Mr Pratt put there something to do. We do, however, have no tip fees for green waste. We have advertising programs every year. We encourage people to do the right thing with their green waste. We do also talk about advertising to encourage people to compost. We also pay for the green waste recycling at the landfill sites. It is an interesting thing. You actually have to pay if you go and get yourself some compost from that contractor at the landfill, but we are paying for it as well. So your rates are actually paying the contractor to recycle the green waste and then you go and buy it off him. So you are actually paying for the stuff twice.

Mrs Dunne: So we are paying twice?

MR HARGREAVES: Yes. You are actually paying twice. That was a contract negotiated by guess who—those bleatologists on the other side of the chamber. I think we are doing quite well. I will get specific information to Dr Foskey and hotfoot it back into the chamber at the earliest opportunity.

DR FOSKEY: Mr Speaker, I have a supplementary question. What is it about the ACT that makes green waste pick-up programs more difficult to run here than in Queanbeyan and Eurobodalla?

MR HARGREAVES: Maybe it has something to do with the fact that we have 328,000 people living here.

Mr Barr: It is 340,000.

MR HARGREAVES: It is 340,000. I am corrected by the minister for education, who has just seen a massive surge in educational uptake in the public education system, centred on, no doubt, all of the goody-good things that his schools are doing with the kids around green waste. What are they doing? Where does it happen? In our schools. They are leading the charge. Go down to any one of the schools in the Lanyon Valley—Mr Gentleman’s electorate and my electorate; Mr Pratt might not know where it is, but that is where it is—

Dr Foskey: Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order of relevance. I will repeat the question: what is it about the ACT that makes green waste pick-up programs more difficult to run here than in Queanbeyan and/or Eurobodalla?

Members interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Order!

MR HARGREAVES: We will not talk about relevance; that is a completely different story altogether. One of the reasons we do not have, for example, yet another bin out in front of everybody’s letterbox next to the police officer is that it costs an absolute fortune to pick it all up—to have a contractor come around and do it with a third bin.

Dr Foskey believes that the Eurobodalla shire is doing such a wonderful job. I will go—not this weekend; not next weekend; but a very close weekend—down to Eurobodalla Shire Council and see the good burghers in Narooma and ask them—over a bottle of Oyster Bay wine, of course. That is what the *Canberra Times* expects me to do on a Thursday. And that is what I will do. I will find out what it is that they are doing that we are not that is so wonderful. Quite frankly, the ACT is doing very, very well, thank you.

Dragway

MR STEFANIAK: My question is to another minister, Mr Barr, the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Recreation. Minister, my question relates to the dragway. You have now received the federal minister for finance’s response to your request for land on which to build a dragway, which closes off the government’s last option to build a dragway. Minister, what alternative uses for the \$8 million appropriated for the dragway have you considered?

MR BARR: The government is of course considering a number of different options in the context of this year’s budget. I indicated to Mr Stefaniak in annual report hearings last week that I had written to the three relevant ministers in the previous federal Liberal government. I have written again to the three relevant ministers in the new government and, sadly, have received the same answer in terms of the availability of the former dragway site and the availability of a further piece of commonwealth land within the territory. That would seem to lead to there being no available site within the territory for a dragway.

I am happy, of course, to examine any other further sites that people might seek to nominate and that may be suitable, excluding, given the detailed assessment that has occurred, the blocks that were proposed in the Majura Valley. So I reiterate my response to Mr Stefaniak that the government will not be reopening investigations on those sites. That work has been done extensively and it is clear that those sites are not suitable. Should the Liberal Party have an alternative position on that, I welcome them to engage with all of the various people who, through extensive study, have indicated quite clearly that those sites are not suitable. Were those opposite ever to form government and seek to proceed with activity on those sites, they would spend a lot of time in court with a variety of opponents, given the extensive nature of all of the studies on those sites.

So it would appear that, unless another site can be found within the borders of the territory, we would have to look at something just across the border in New South Wales. We have been approached by the former lessee of Wakefield Park in Goulburn who had a block of land adjacent to Wakefield Park, but it would appear that that proposal is not supported by dragway proponents within the ACT. I might add that the thousands of postcards on the particular campaign that have been received in my office have largely been from New South Wales residents—I am sure there is interest in surrounding New South Wales for such a facility—but it would appear that there is not land available within the ACT. So, unless someone can come forward very quickly with an alternative block, alternative considerations will have to be made. But they will be made in the context of budget deliberations and we will make announcements in due course.

MR SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Mr Stefaniak?

MR STEFANIAK: Yes, thank you, Mr Speaker. I thank the minister for his answer. Minister, will all or part of the money be spent on other motor sport facilities?

MR BARR: Yes, that would be the government's intention, but of course these matters are subject to further budget consideration. The money was made available for motor sport activities, most specifically a dragway, should a suitable site be found. As it would appear that a suitable site cannot be found, we will have to consider a range of other options. But I will not close the door absolutely and finally on the dragway until we have exhausted all possibilities. So I put the call out again: should there be a suitable site found, the money is still available for a dragway at this point in time.

Education—Canberra Institute of Technology

MS PORTER: Mr Speaker, my question, through you, is to the minister for education. Would the minister advise the Assembly of the steps being taken by the Stanhope government, through the Canberra Institute of Technology, to address the skills shortage?

MR BARR: I thank Ms Porter, again, for her interest in education and training. The timing of Ms Porter's question is indeed very good. I had the opportunity, during the lunch break, to visit the Canberra Institute of Technology's Reid campus, where

I officially launched two new fast-track apprenticeship courses. These new apprenticeship courses are being offered in the skill-shortage areas of panel beating and hairdressing.

The CIT's innovative fast-track apprenticeships will ensure that ACT business operators continue to have access to the skilled workers they need and that our students can complete their apprenticeships up to 30 per cent faster. By shortening the length of the apprenticeship, while maintaining the quality of training, the CIT will get skilled workers into the workforce faster and make apprenticeship more appealing to mature aged students and those who are seeking a career change.

As always, the government and the CIT have been working closely with industry, through the hairdressing industry representative panel, to implement these fast-track apprenticeships. The panel held its initial meeting on Monday of this week and comprises a range of senior industry representatives as well as representatives from my Department of Education and Training and representatives from the Australian Workers Union. I thank members of the panel for their commitment to working with government to address local skills shortages.

The fast-track panel beating apprenticeship takes a different approach, by focusing on increasing the quality and quantity of on-the-job assessment. While off-the-job training is critical to the training process, it has been recognised by industry that, if on-the-job assessment could be better integrated into training, then competency could be better recognised and rewarded as it occurs.

Like the fast-track hairdressing apprenticeship, the panel beating apprenticeship also engages fully with industry. In this case, the industry representative group comprises senior representatives, including those from Insurance Australia Ltd, Craig Hall Bodyworks, Precision Panel, Moruya Smash Repairs and Tony Farrugia Bodyworks, amongst others. The program delivers fully qualified panel beaters onto the market at least one year earlier and possibly even up to two years earlier than the existing apprenticeship.

These innovations in apprenticeship training are based on the CIT's fast-track apprenticeship program that we introduced in 2006. The accelerated chefs program enables apprentices to complete their training in two years instead of four.

The success of this program is partly why, just last week, the CIT won the 2007 Qantas Australian tourism award for the best tourism, education and training organisation in Australia for the second year in a row and for the fifth time overall. These fast-track apprenticeships are just part of what the ACT government and the CIT are doing to address the local impacts of the national skills shortage caused by 11 long years of underinvestment in education and training by the federal Liberal government.

Last year, I was able to launch the ACT's first Australian school-based apprenticeship certificate level 3 in plumbing which provides students with the opportunity to start a plumbing apprenticeship while still completing their year 12 certificate. This program is also a partnership between the ACT government and, in this case, licensed

plumbers who have taken on these apprentices and without whose support the program would not be a success.

Last November, I was also privileged to launch the CIT Vocational College, another innovation providing students with the opportunity to develop their essential skills while studying in areas that have a high demand for new employees, such as childcare, aged care, automotive, hairdressing and engineering. It also caters for those students who need some additional support to pursue their life goals.

While the federal Liberals failed for 11 years to invest in the skills of young Australians and young Canberrans—those opposite sat mute throughout this time—and while they were busy slashing wages and conditions, the only way that the federal Liberals and the Liberal Party thought they could create jobs was to slash wages and conditions. The toadies opposite cheered them on all the way through.

It is only now I notice that Mr Stefaniak goes cap in hand to a meeting with Unions ACT seeking to back away from all the positions that were advocated so strongly by those opposite. Their support of Work Choices, their support of slashing of conditions—

Mrs Burke: On a point of order: 118 (a), being precise and confined to the subject matter.

MR SPEAKER: The subject matter is apprenticeships. One of the attractions that Mr Barr pointed to of working in the motor industry is wages. He was pointing to the fall in wages for workers as one of the issues for the drop-off in apprenticeships, I thought. I think he is relevant. The minister's time has expired.

MR SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Ms Porter?

MS PORTER: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Would the minister advise the Assembly about other steps the ACT Labor government is taking to ensure the future strength of the ACT economy and address skill shortages through education?

MR BARR: Those opposite do not like hearing it, but their record on skills, education and supporting the slashing of wages and conditions of Canberran and Australian workers stands condemned.

Mrs Dunne: Point of order, Mr Speaker.

MR SPEAKER: I have already ruled on this point of order.

Mrs Dunne: No; this is a separate point of order. My point of order is that, when the minister answers a question, as far as possible he cannot mislead the Assembly by uttering untruths. He has said that we supported the cutting of wages—

MR SPEAKER: Withdraw that.

Mrs Dunne: when the record shows—

MR SPEAKER: The imputation—

Mrs Dunne: when the record shows—

MR SPEAKER: Mrs Dunne, if you want to move a motion about Mr Barr's behaviour in the chamber, feel free to do so in accordance with the standing orders, but you cannot impute that somebody has misled the Assembly by raising it as a point of order. I ask you to withdraw that.

Mrs Dunne: What are you asking me to withdraw?

MR SPEAKER: The imputation that Mr Barr has misled the Assembly.

Mrs Dunne: I withdraw the imputation. But, Mr Speaker, do you have any ruling to make on the fact that, when a minister answers a question, he may not imply that certain things are the case when the record shows that they are the opposite? For instance, he said that we had overseen a fall in wages when in fact the historical evidence—

MR SPEAKER: Order! Mrs Dunne—

Mrs Dunne: shows that there has been an increase in wages.

MR SPEAKER: This is getting to the point where this is a spurious point of order, but let me say this: it is not for me to judge the quality of a minister's answers; it is for this house to judge those and deal with them in accordance with the standing orders. Mr Barr is given five minutes to answer questions which are raised by other members in this place; provided he sticks to the subject matter of the question, he can proceed.

MR BARR: Thank you, Mr Speaker. They do not like hearing this.

MR SPEAKER: It was not about whether they liked hearing it or not, so come back to the subject matter.

MR BARR: Thank you, Mr Speaker. The record of those opposite on skills, education and industrial relations and the important links that are contained within those three areas stands to be condemned. It is no wonder they are back-peddalling.

It is clear that the key to a strong economy and a vibrant and tolerant society is education, and the key to ensuring that each individual has the best chance to lead a happy and productive life in making a contribution to our economy and our society is education and training. We on this side of the chamber know this.

Judging by the lack of policy coming from the opposition, particularly the new spokesperson on education, it is clear that there is only one party for education and training in the ACT, and that is the Australian Labor Party. We on this side know that studies have positively demonstrated the effect of not only good early childhood education but lifelong learning through a range of educational and training opportunities.

That is why the government is investing in new early childhood schools that will commence in 2009. That is why we are providing a range of additional supports through public education, through our new curriculum framework and through a number of other key initiatives, working in partnership with the commonwealth government, particularly in relation to the establishment of trade training centres in our senior secondary schools. We continue to provide resources where they are needed within both our public education system and our TAFE system, CIT.

This stands in contrast to the position of those opposite. I noted with interest that a few weeks back the independent schools association put out a call for parties to release policies on education—in the spirit of welcoming the fact that the new spokesperson on education, the opposition leader, did in fact deign to put out a policy. He has; he has put one out. The only problem is that it was a direct copy of the policy that I released 12 months earlier in relation to student welfare. With great fanfare, Mr Seselja said, “Oh, there should be a forum called on community safety and safety in schools.” The problem for Mr Seselja is that if he had bothered to do even a modicum of research he would have noted that such a forum was held last year, and a safe schools task force was established.

Mrs Dunne: And that really worked, didn't it? How many times were the police called out?

Mr Pratt: And look where that got us, Andrew.

MR SPEAKER: Order! I think you are straying a little too far.

MR BARR: Mr Speaker, the question was about how education and skills helped benefit the ACT economy.

Mrs Burke: How does the opposition policy help?

MR BARR: I am talking specifically around this and safe education environments. Although those opposite do not want to hear it, the only policy that we see from the Leader of the Opposition—

MR SPEAKER: Resume your seat, please.

Balloon Aloft

MR SMYTH: My question is to the minister for tourism. Minister, on 19 February, you announced that Balloon Aloft would be operating a balloon spectacular in April this year, with funding of \$70,000 representing “best value for money for ACT taxpayers”. You confirmed this arrangement at the hearing of the public accounts committee on 28 February this year. Yesterday, however, minister, you announced here in the Assembly that Balloon Aloft would only receive \$10,000 as a fee for service for this event. Minister, when did you change your mind, and why did you change your mind, about how the balloon event would be managed and decide that the management of the event would be brought “in house”?

MR BARR: I must say that the shadow minister is displaying his complete ignorance around the history of this event and its past operation. Let me enlighten him. We will go back to yesterday's point. I made the comparison, when asked about the value for money of the option that the government has chosen, that Balloon Aloft's fee for service, taken from the overall budget of \$70,000 for the nine-day event, would be \$10,000—\$10,000 out of the \$70,000. Have you got that? Very good. That was in contrast to the previous operator's bid for a \$90,000 event management fee, out of a total claim on the budget of \$493,000. Have you got that too?

I indicated, and I repeat for the benefit of Mr Smyth, who is clearly winning the award today for the slowest shadow minister of the day, that the Chief Minister's special events unit would support the 2008 event through the management of on-site infrastructure, programming of entertainment and procurement of sponsorship, and that Australian Capital Tourism would support the event through interstate marketing and promotion. Now guess what: this arrangement does not differ significantly from the arrangements put in place in the past to support the previous operator. In 2006, Tourism support for the organisation was \$92,000 in cash, plus insurance and significant in-kind support through staffing, advertising, marketing and operational services. In addition, Tourism staff provided site management and event operations on a voluntary basis, amounting to an estimated total of 250 hours of voluntary work from Tourism staff, Mr Smyth, under the previous operator in 2006.

Mr Smyth: What happened last year?

MR BARR: Let us go back to 2005.

Mr Smyth: Go to 2007. What happened last year?

MR SPEAKER: Mr Smyth, you have had your question. Order!

MR BARR: Twenty thousand dollars in cash was provided through the ACT festival fund and \$50,000 was provided through the event assistance program—similar to this year's funding arrangement. But just prior to the event the operators came forward and said, "Look, we're really struggling, we'll need additional resources." So the government stumped up an extra \$15,000 in cash through Tourism for advertising on behalf of the fiesta, \$11,400 in additional cash for event research on behalf of the event, and \$25,000 worth of in-kind support provided through an enhanced program of entertainment titled "Circus of the Air". Guess who presented that: the Chief Minister's Department, as part of the Celebrate Canberra program. Again, considerable in-kind staff assistance and creative expertise were provided to the event by Tourism and by the Chief Minister's Department. The operation of this year's event will be no different in terms of the support provided by Tourism and the Chief Minister's Department than has been the case in every other year. Let us go back and look at the 20-year history of this event. In fact, in 14 of those years it was run entirely out of the Chief Minister's Department.

Mr Smyth: On a point of order, Mr Speaker, the history lesson is useful but the question is: when did you change your mind and why did you change your mind about the event and why is it being managed in house?

MR SPEAKER: I think he is trying to explain that.

MR BARR: The simple answer to Mr Smyth's question, having given him a little bit of a history lesson, is that there was no change. It was always the case that Balloon Aloft was going to be contracted to provide support in its area of speciality. As has been the case with the event throughout its history, regardless of whether it was being run entirely in house by the ACT government or by the Canberra balloon fiesta in the last five or six years, the majority of on-the-ground support—advertising, marketing, event management—is provided by the Chief Minister's Department and Tourism. The only change that has occurred over that entire time was that, through last year's event and through a desire into the future on the part of the previous operator, they wanted to bring in an events management company from Melbourne to undertake more of that role. But guess what: who was going to pay for it? The ACT government. They wanted \$90,000 to do it.

When faced with an option of a four or five-day event for \$70,000 or the event that we are getting, nine days for the same amount of money, and the two event management options—\$10,000 from the local company or \$90,000 to bring someone in from Melbourne—it is pretty clear where the value for money is. But no, that does not stop Mr Smyth continuing this campaign to smear the reputation of the Chief Minister's Department and the excellent staff who work within that unit and who will deliver a fantastic balloon event this year. I hope Mr Smyth can find it in himself to be big enough to enjoy the event, but I doubt that he will.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Smyth with a supplementary question.

MR SMYTH: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Minister, why have you decided that the event would be better managed by staff of the ACT government? What will this cost in dollars and in-kind support? Have you approved the business plan for this year's event?

MR BARR: I have just answered that question extensively, but just to remind Mr Smyth again and to put this one to bed finally, Chief Minister's and Tourism have been providing in-kind support and doing marketing and a range of activities for this event over its entire history, regardless of whether it has been entirely run within Chief Minister's or parts of the event management have been contracted out. It has still been a fundamental requirement because the previous organisers were unable to run the event without the assistance of the ACT government. It has been shown clearly through this process that they were unable, even though they bid for the event, to do it within the allotted budget. They made that very clear to us. They did not accept our funding offers. We went to someone else. We went to a local company who can deliver a great outcome. We will work in partnership with them to deliver a fantastic balloon event.

But, no, that is not enough for Mr Smyth. He has to continue this personal vendetta that he seems to have against a local Canberra ballooning company. The real question that we have to ask here is: just what is it that Balloon Aloft have done to offend Mr Smyth? What is it that they have done? What connections do you have, Mr Smyth,

to the other company? I mean, there is a range of scuttlebutt going around this town at the moment—

Mrs Dunne: I raise a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Smyth: I raise a point of order, Mr Speaker.

MR BARR: that, in fact, you are out trying to procure sponsorship for the other event. Is that true?

MR SPEAKER: Order!

MR BARR: Is that true? Are you out procuring sponsorship—

MR SPEAKER: Order, Mr Barr! Sit down.

Mr Smyth: Under standing order 118 (b) the minister cannot debate the subject. The question was simply: why have you decided the event would be better managed by staff of the ACT government? What will this event cost in dollars and in-kind support for the ACT taxpayers? Have you approved the business plan?

MR SPEAKER: Stick with the subject matter, Mr Barr.

Mrs Dunne: On the point of order, Mr Speaker. The minister, in his attempt to answer this question, has just made a series of imputations about Mr Smyth. Those imputations should be withdrawn.

Mr Stanhope: On the point of order, Mr Speaker, there was no imputation in the suggestion. It was a rhetorical question asking Mr Smyth whether or not he is actively engaged in seeking sponsorship for the balloonfest. That is quite a legitimate question to ask. Is he out there in a moonlighting fashion as a business manager for the balloonfest? It is a reasonable question to be posed.

MR SPEAKER: Order! I get the point. Rhetorical questions have been a strong tradition in this chamber on both sides.

Mrs Dunne: Mr Speaker, I was not referring to rhetorical questions. I was referring to direct imputations that Mr Smyth has behaved in some underhand way in relation to this—

MR SPEAKER: I will have a look at it. You had better be specific. I am not going to rule on something as non-specific as that. What in particular were you referring to?

Mrs Dunne: What I was referring to was the imputation that Mr Smyth had some inappropriate relationship with the company that had lost the—

Mr Pratt: It was a pretty strong imputation.

Mrs Dunne: It was a very strong imputation and it should be withdrawn.

MR SPEAKER: I will have a look at the *Hansard*.

Mr Stanhope: It was just a suggestion that he is moonlighting. That was all.

MR SPEAKER: Order!

MR BARR: Thank you, Mr Speaker. The question that I am simply asking is: given Mr Smyth's very intense interest in this matter, allegations have come forward to me that Mr Smyth is, in fact, out seeking sponsorship. But, look, that is a matter for him. He can clear the record on that one. He can make a statement and make it quite clear what he has been up to.

Just to make absolutely clear again for Mr Smyth, the event budget is \$70,000. Balloon Aloft's fee is \$10,000. The remainder of the money will be spent as is, under the guidelines, appropriate for the event program around interstate marketing and promotion of the event. The ACT government will continue to provide in-kind support, as it has done for the event throughout its history. The level of in-kind support has varied somewhere between \$60,000 and \$120,000 from year to year, depending on the year, and that will continue.

I look forward to what will be an outstanding event. It will coincide with the Olympic torch relay. There will be a mass balloon ascension. It will be a great event for Canberra. What would be a great pity would be if the shadow minister continued to denigrate the event and continued to peddle around the David Marshalls and Joseph Griffiths of this town looking for support, noting, of course, that they reject his position.

ACTION bus service—network

MR GENTLEMAN: My question is to the minister for transport. Can the minister advise the Assembly what work ACTION is undertaking regarding its proposed new bus network, network 08?

Mrs Dunne: I raise a point of order, Mr Speaker. The question is out of order as there is no minister for transport.

MR SPEAKER: You will have to direct your question to—

MR GENTLEMAN: I will direct my question to the Minister for Territory and Municipal Services, Mr Speaker.

MR HARGREAVES: I thank Mr Gentleman for the question and, of course, for his ongoing interest in matters transport. ACTION and the ACT government are committed to building a better bus service for the Canberra community. ACTION has undertaken a comprehensive review of its bus services because the current bus network is extremely complex with over 90 routes. The current network causes confusion for many commuters and potential commuters. There is also an oversupply of routes in some areas compared to other public transport systems.

The proposed network plan is designed to provide a simpler network with higher frequency services. The new plan replaces the current weekday and evenings/weekend bus services with a seven-day bus services network. As part of the review, onboard passenger counts, on-bus surveys and on/off passenger destinations were conducted on every route service. This information, in addition to patronage reports and customer and driver feedback, provided some of the tools used by the network planner to design the network.

In July 2007 a comprehensive service review was conducted. This review included a passenger boarding count and feedback survey. The passenger count recorded where passengers got on and off buses throughout the day, providing valuable reference data. The community was encouraged to provide input into planning via an online and hard copy feedback mechanism.

In August 2007 the Standing Committee on Planning and Environment released a report on ACTION buses and the sustainable transport plan. This report provided key recommendations for improvement in ACTION's bus service, and I thank the chairman of the Standing Committee on Planning and Environment, Mr Gentleman, for that initiative.

In November 2007 the draft plan of bus services was released to the community for comment. The proposed network plan was available to view on ACTION's website and at all bus interchanges, Canberra Connect shopfronts and libraries. This information was advertised through the media—in the *Canberra Times* and the *Chronicle* and on FM and AM radio stations.

The network plan improvements include: earlier weekend start times on many routes; more express route services; bus routes the same seven days a week, as currently there are different routes operating in the evenings and on weekends; improved frequency between services, with some routes having doubled in frequency from one every hour to one every half an hour; new bus services from Gungahlin, Civic, Woden and Tuggeranong to Brindabella Business Park; and improved connections between bus routes.

Community consultation about the proposed plan has been strong. Over 2,500 individual responses to the plan have been received and are currently being reviewed by ACTION. The feedback has highlighted key areas for review. Broadly, these include: coverage; direction of some of the proposed routes; changes or deletions of some routes; and connection between routes. I have asked ACTION to bring forward amendments to the plan to address these concerns. A revised plan will be considered by the government shortly. I note that the only contribution to the revised network that the temporary Leader of the Opposition has put forward is that he is interested in seeing a change in the colour of the buses. Well, he will have to wait to see that.

What has been missed by those opposite, quite clearly, is the fact that the 2,500 comments came in to us from the community as part of the consultation process over a proposed bus route—a proposal. What is happening is that Mr Smyth and Mr Pratt are going around the community, saying that this is a done deal, whipping up a storm

of hysteria: “You’re going to lose this; you’re going to lose that.” But these are proposals—nothing short of that. Once people’s feedback has been received, we can have a look and perhaps change it. Whenever you put a proposal down and request feedback, sometimes as a result of that feedback you have to make some changes. Otherwise, why would you do the consultation?

These folks opposite are pre-empting that particular result. They have to, because of their sheer relevance deprivation, whip up a storm and keep people in a state of fear so that people need them come the election time. The problem is that the people do not need them come the election time.

MR GENTLEMAN: Mr Speaker, I have a supplementary question. As part of this work, can the minister say what action he is proposing specifically in relation to route 769?

MR HARGREAVES: I thank Mr Gentleman for the question. Mr Gentleman has done something that those opposite have not done: he has actually been on a bus on route 769; he has actually travelled on it.

Mr Smyth: Point of order, Mr Speaker: I rode on the 769 two weeks ago. So what the minister has just said is not true.

MR SPEAKER: Order! That is not a point of order. That is an abuse of the standing orders, Mr Smyth, and I will not tolerate any more of this.

Mr Corbell: On the point of order, Mr Speaker: members of the opposition are repeatedly making points of order designed simply to assert a counter debating point. That is an abuse of the standing orders. Not only Mr Smyth but also Mrs Dunne are frequent offenders in this regard. I ask you to give further consideration as to what steps you can take to stop the abuse of the standing orders in this way.

MR HARGREAVES: In answer to Mr Gentleman’s question, I have been informed by ACTION that, based on customer feedback, including a petition of 300 signatures, the proposed removal of route 769 from Theodore, Calwell shops, Chisholm shops, Russell Offices, city interchange and City West has been identified as a high priority for review. The matter of route 33, through the Campbell area, has also been raised.

Let me assure you that community consultation has been a genuine process. ACTION has considered all feedback received and is working through all areas of the plan. I have also met with constituents from the Campbell area concerned with route 33 and Weston Creek concerned with the express service 729 regarding the proposed bus changes. These discussions have been extremely productive in more fully understanding the travel needs of individuals. Of course, at this stage I am unable to advise what change will occur until the government considers the revised network plan.

Finalising and scheduling a new network is a complex process, which ACTION will not rush. I am confident that Canberrans will be pleased with the final network. Network 08 will demonstrate the government’s commitment to providing a sustainable public transport system for all Canberrans.

ACTION appreciates the community's patience. The government thanks the community for the immense feedback it provided. Once finalised, ACTION will communicate the network plan to the community. Subject to the government agreement, ACTION plans to launch a new network and have the communication processes—that is, a distribution of timetables, signs, posters et cetera—completed in May.

This has been a particularly extensive consultation process and a genuine one. I have met with people who have come in groups to my office. I have been pleased to see them. We received their concerns and addressed them. And I, like many others out there, have spoken.

I have not been able to allay concerns caused by the misrepresentation of Mr Pratt and Mr Smyth out there in the electorate. They have been doing it together. Quite clearly, Mr Smyth is saying to people that route 769 in Calwell—he is whipping up a storm—has been removed. There is no such thing. There is a proposal on the table. It is disingenuous of these people to suggest that. I could not believe it when I saw this sort of thing—the puppet master Mr Smyth with the Pinocchio of Mr Pratt going out into the community and frightening them.

MR SPEAKER: Order! Mr Hargreaves, refer to members by their proper titles.

MR HARGREAVES: All right then, both of the—I will refer to both of them; I am trying to comply with the direction—

Mr Pratt: Point of order, Mr Speaker: just to take that issue one step further, there is imputation as well. The Pinocchio bit would indicate lying.

MR SPEAKER: I have ruled on it.

MR HARGREAVES: No; it refers to a wooden puppet, Mr Speaker. I will refer to them as the members for Brindabella for the time being. What is really upsetting is that the people—genuinely engaged in a consultation process to tell us how something is affecting them—are being frightened by the misinformation that these people are putting out there. I sincerely wish they would stop. If you want to criticise the network, wait until it is finished; don't do it halfway. You are perpetuating the story and you are both making fools of yourselves.

Hospitals—emergency department

MRS DUNNE: Minister, on 14 February this year in the Assembly, regarding the performance of emergency departments in Canberra's hospitals, you said:

Anyone who stands here needs to be honest and say these things take time, and I have said that time and time again.

I think that is called the Pantene excuse, Mr Speaker. Minister, how many more times must the people of Canberra hear you tell them that it will take time to fix the problems in the emergency departments of our hospitals?

MS GALLAGHER: Mr Speaker, I stand by those comments. Any change, any reform in health, takes time to bring about that change. We can see that from the fact that it has taken us six years to replace the 114 beds that were taken out of the system by the previous government. You cannot just snap your fingers and completely deliver a new service overnight.

We have been putting in place over the past four to five years significant programs to deal with emergency department timeliness. The emergency departments at both hospitals are now seeing over 100,000 presentations a year. The biggest growth in those presentations has occurred in categories 3 and 4. We are doing excellently in categories 1, 2 and 5; improvements have been made. It is not moving at the speed at which I would like it to move, but it is moving in the right direction. We have extra staff coming on; extra doctors are coming on in the next few months, which I believe will improve our timeliness.

I do not want to stand here and make excuses for timeliness in the emergency departments, because it does need to improve. However, we also need to see it in the context of the overall health system—that is, that we have the lowest GP numbers in the country and we have the lowest bulk-billing rates in the country. It has followed on that our presentations, particularly for less urgent conditions, have increased at a much greater rate than we would have liked.

The capacity of the emergency departments to deal with that takes time to increase. That is why we are having the discussion now about the capital asset development plan. The emergency departments at both hospitals are full to capacity. There are no extra beds that can be put in there. The waiting areas are restrained by their location and their size. To increase our capacity to treat the growth we are seeing in presentations requires a significant rethink of the way our hospitals are currently operating. That is why the capital asset development plan is so important and why it should be supported by those opposite. Unfortunately, at the moment, that support is not forthcoming.

Back to the emergency departments—as I said earlier today, we are seeing improvements in categories 3 and 4 compared to last year. The implementation of the fast-track initiative has been getting a lot of good feedback, and the new medical assessment planning unit is seeing patients much faster and getting them through the emergency departments much faster than in the past. We are looking at further expansions of another model around the MAPU to improve that. Our categories 1, 2 and 5 are excellent. We need extra to work extra hard on categories 3 and 4, but we are seeing improvements.

I am not going to stand here and say that improvements will be delivered by 30 June or, indeed, by the end of December. It takes time. The strategies are working, but we have to see them in the context of our emergency departments working to capacity with no further growth available and also in the context of increasing numbers of presentations coming every year. The short answer is that while the growth continues and we cannot expand, we are going to struggle to improve considerably on the direction we are heading now.

MR SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Mrs Dunne?

MRS DUNNE: Thank you, Mr Speaker. If we are not going to see the improvements that the minister spoke of by 30 December this year—

MR SPEAKER: Come to the supplementary question.

MRS DUNNE: when will we see an improvement, or is there just going to be continuing cover-up for your government's mismanagement of the hospitals?

MS GALLAGHER: I have already said—

MR SPEAKER: Mrs Dunne, some might say, given the virtuous pleading to me on a point of order earlier, that that might be an imputation if one was to refine it.

MS GALLAGHER: As I have already said, we have seen improvements, and I expect those improvements to be sustained. I look forward to reporting to the Assembly on those improvements, in the ways that we currently do. I look forward to receiving the congratulations of those opposite when they receive that information.

Balloon Aloft

MR PRATT: My question is to the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Recreation. Minister, yesterday in question time, you confirmed that the new operator of the balloon event would be paid a fee—

Mr Hargreaves interjecting—

MR PRATT: I like balloons, John.

MR SPEAKER: Order!

MR PRATT: I will start my question again.

MR SPEAKER: I think that would be a good idea, and it would be good if people did not interject.

MR PRATT: Minister, yesterday in question time, you confirmed that the new operator of the balloon event would be paid a fee of \$10,000 for what you described as a “fee for service” and a “management fee”. Minister, what services will Balloon Aloft be providing for the balloon event for that fee and will those services include ensuring public safety at the event?

Mr Hargreaves: Weren't you here? You must have been missing.

MR SPEAKER: Order, Mr Hargreaves!

MR BARR: As I indicated in my previous answer to Mr Smyth's question, and his supplementary, ad nauseam—and, yes, Mr Hargreaves, it takes a long while for fairly

simple things to sink in for these guys—Balloon Aloft, together with Australian Capital Tourism and the Chief Minister's events unit, will take responsibility for the management, delivery and promotion of the event. Those organisations will take responsibility for all aspects of safety around the event, both in terms of the balloons themselves and in terms of the activities that occur on the ground. Of course, all appropriate precautions will be taken around public safety.

It is very clear that the exorbitant amount that was bid for by the previous operators, and particularly the \$90,000 event management fee, was way, way above the odds for the sort of event that we want to see here in Canberra. Those opposite are definitely bitterly disappointed with the government's decision. They have a clear concern, and the allegations and imputations in this question are that an experienced commercial balloon operator, who had been operating in Canberra for, I understand, 22 years or more, is seemingly incapable of organising a safe balloon event. Let me make it very clear to those opposite that the organisation that we are partnering with to deliver this event has a very good record, and a very well and long-established record, of operating balloon events in the ACT, and the people who are involved have considerable skill in this matter.

The staff from the Chief Minister's Department events unit and the Australian Capital Tourism staff have done this before. They have involvement, and the ACT government has involvement, in this event going back to 1986. So you would think that that would be enough experience, given that the ACT government and these agencies have been involved since the inception of the event, for the opposition to have confidence in our ability to deliver a good event for Canberra. But it would appear that they do not. I look forward, as do the staff in Australian Capital Tourism and the staff of the events unit of the Chief Minister's Department and Balloon Aloft, to proving these naysayers wrong. I know they are going to try desperately to tear this event down. They do not believe in this event; they do not believe in Canberra locals putting on a good event. That is their concern. That is what they will continue to peddle. Mr Smyth and now Mr Pratt will continue to use parliamentary privilege to besmirch the reputation of public servants in this town.

Disappointingly, it seems that, despite all of the questions and all of the opportunities they have had to investigate these matters, they still come back to these same churlish points. It really is insulting to the staff within the Chief Minister's Department, within Australian Capital Tourism and within Balloon Aloft to suggest they are incapable of running an event with which they have had a 20-year association. In fact, the real concern through all of this is their desire to see taxpayers' money wasted under the previous arrangement. Presumably, their position here is that the government should have just written a blank cheque to the previous operators and said: "Yep, whatever you want; it doesn't matter. We're so concerned about the fallout by not using you and using another operator that we'll just write you a blank cheque." If that is the sort of financial management we are going to see under the Liberal Party with Brendan Smyth as the alternative Treasurer in this place, if that is his attitude to public finance, it is no wonder that Mr Mulcahy, the only Liberal elected to this place in 2004 with any economic capability, was turned down, when you have got Smythanomics coming forward.

Mr Smyth: Mr Speaker, I raise a point of order regarding relevance. Under standing order 118 (b), the minister cannot debate the subject.

MR SPEAKER: Order! Mr Smyth has asked me to rule on relevance. Mr Barr is continuing the theme in accordance with the subject matter of the question. Is there a supplementary question?

MR PRATT: My supplementary question to the minister is this: minister, what due diligence has the government conducted on proposals to ensure public safety at the event?

MR BARR: The government will, as it does with all events, ensure that public safety is paramount. The government continues to do so through all events that we support, through direct event management in events such as Celebrate Canberra that the Chief Minister's special events unit is running this long weekend. We will continue, through all the events that we support, to ensure that public safety is paramount.

This event is no different from any other event that the ACT government is involved in in terms of safety being paramount. This event is one that the government has previously operated. I stress again: this is not new; this is not something that we have never done before; this is something we have been involved in for 22 years.

Mr Hargreaves: Including them.

MR BARR: Yes. In fact, the opposition party happened to be the government of the territory then. They were involved in running this event, it would seem. If the ACT government were incapable—

Mr Pratt: On a point of order, Mr Speaker, under 118 (a), can the minister just answer the question: what is the detail of due diligence? I do not care about the history. Can you tell me what has been done about the due diligence process to ensure public safety?

MR SPEAKER: I have been listening closely. It was a pretty straightforward question, and the minister is reinforcing the fact that it has been run by the government for many years.

MR BARR: They may not like the answer and they may not like the fact that the government has been involved in the organisation and running of this event since its inception in 1986.

If there was a big move away from what has been the history of these events, it was when parts of the management were outsourced to CBF in 2002. It would be fair to say that, over the course of that time, the event has had significant difficulties and that it has nearly fallen over on more than one occasion and has had to be propped up by government because the previous operators would indicate, and continued to indicate, at the last moment their inability to deliver the event without additional government assistance.

The Chief Minister and I have made it very clear that we would not allow this to happen again. This is not the first time that the previous operators have come cap in hand six weeks before the event and said, "We do not have enough money. We cannot make it happen. It is not going to happen unless you give us more money." This time we have made an assessment that there was a risk of the event not going ahead, and we had alternative arrangements ready to go should the Canberra Balloon Fiesta indicate, as they did in writing, that they could not go ahead with the event.

Mr Smyth hates that. He hates that mismanagement. Mr Pratt hates that, too. I repeat the point that this Liberal opposition are determined to see this event fail and are determined to undermine this event, to undermine a local ballooning company of more than 20 years experience, and to undermine what is a crucial part of the event calendar for Canberra in autumn.

It will be a fantastic event. It will be wonderful to see record levels of community involvement, most particularly through the mass balloon ascension as part of the Olympic torch relay on 24 April. I look forward to celebrating this event with thousands of Canberrans who, I know, will enjoy it. I hope that, by the time the event arrives in April, the opposition have got over their little sook and will enjoy the event, too.

ACT Policing—performance

MS MacDONALD: My question is to Mr Corbell in his capacity as Attorney-General. Can the minister advise the Assembly on ACT Policing's progress in tackling the problems of burglary, break and enter and car theft offences in Canberra?

MR CORBELL: I thank Ms MacDonald for her question. I am very pleased to advise the Assembly that the latest criminal justice statistics, which I tabled in this place yesterday, show that Canberra is now experiencing its lowest level of burglary and break-and-enter offences for the past decade. Burglary and break-and-enter offences are now down by 16 per cent. This is the lowest 12-month figure for 10 years. It equates to over 800 homes not being burgled in the ACT in the past 12 months compared to previous years.

I want to extend to ACT Policing my very strong congratulations on a very significant effort to target and tackle the issue of burglary and theft in our community. In particular, I want to acknowledge that this government's investment in additional police for the ACT is clearly making a very significant difference on the ground. I am sure that many Canberrans would be pleased to know that 800 fewer homes were burgled or had thefts this year as a result of the strategies the government has put in place through its property theft crime reduction strategy and additional policing numbers.

Let me just look at those figures more clearly. In relation to burglary and break and enter, the total number of offences was 4,100 in the 12 months to December last year compared to 4,860 offences in the 12 months to December 2006—800 fewer offences, or a 16 per cent decrease.

In addition, we have seen very encouraging results when it comes to motor vehicle theft. This government is committed to driving motor vehicle theft down further with the major expansion of the car immobiliser program which the government announced late last year and which, if I recall correctly, will see approximately 5,000 additional immobilisers made available to owners of older cars across the ACT.

We are already seeing very significant improvements around issues to do with motor vehicle theft. In the 12 months to December 2007, motor vehicle theft decreased by 19 per cent—with 430 fewer cars being stolen in the ACT in that year compared to previous years. And that is ahead of the immobiliser program that the government recently announced.

This shows the government's commitment to making Canberra a fairer and safer community. These sorts of results—a 10-year low when it comes to burglary and break-and-enter figures and a 19 per cent reduction in car theft—are a good indicator that the government's long-term approach to property crime reduction is yielding results. Our investment in our police force is yielding results. Overwhelmingly, on these sorts of bread-and-butter offences that have such a detrimental impact on so many people across our community, we are getting good outcomes that are helping to build a fairer and safer Canberra.

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

Personal explanation

MRS DUNNE (Ginninderra): Mr Speaker, I seek leave to make a personal explanation in accordance with standing order 46.

MR SPEAKER: Mrs Dunne, have you been misrepresented?

MRS DUNNE: I have, Mr Speaker. When I asked a supplementary question of Ms Gallagher today in question time, you, Mr Speaker, made an aside about how I should not ask a question like that and then seek succour for other members in this place.

The point I made was about Ms Gallagher's performance as a minister and the government's performance as an administrator of the hospital. Previously in question time I had asked you to rule certain words out of order because ministers had made personal comments about the motivations and implied nefarious actions on Mr Smyth's part. There is a difference of degree, in that one is a political statement and one was a deeply personal and deeply offensive statement. I am concerned that there have been a number of occasions when you do not deal evenly with members in this place.

MR SPEAKER: Mrs Dunne, that is reflecting on the chair. If you want to move a motion in relation to it, you might proceed in that direction, but you will not do it by way of a personal explanation. I might add that, had I been minded to, I could quite appropriately have ruled your question out of order because of the imputations it

contained therein and the specific point in standing order 117 (b) (iv) which prohibits imputations being contained in questions. I hope that clears that up.

Supplementary answer to question on notice Health—radiopharmaceuticals

MS GALLAGHER: Mr Speaker, yesterday in question time Mrs Dunne asked me a question about the Lucas Heights nuclear reactor, and I can advise the Assembly that the closure has had no impact on medical services provided to the people of the ACT.

Personal explanations

MR PRATT (Brindabella): Mr Speaker, under standing order 46 I too wish to make a personal explanation.

MR SPEAKER: Have you been misrepresented?

MR PRATT: Yes, indeed. Mr Speaker, this afternoon Mr Hargreaves said here in question time that Mr Smyth and I had been going around misleading the community about the 769 and 768 services and he said that we had been saying that those services were going to be cancelled.

The explanation I have in relation to that is this: when we received the petition here in the Assembly I spoke very clearly about that petition and I spoke clearly about the deep concern expressed by southern Tuggeranong residents about the proposed cancellation of bus services 768 and 769 and the negative impact that such a cancellation, were it to proceed, would have. At no time did I say that 769 and 768 had been cut or were being cut, but we did say that they were proposed cancellations according to the consultation process.

MR SMYTH (Brindabella): Mr Speaker, I would also like to make a personal explanation.

MR SPEAKER: Have you been misrepresented, Mr Smyth?

MR SMYTH: I have indeed, Mr Speaker. Mr Hargreaves during question time said words to the effect that Mr Gentleman had caught a bus and that in effect I had not. For the record, I have caught both routes 769 and 768 within the last month to ascertain, one, their usage and, two, exactly where people get off and on the bus.

On the second issue, as with Mr Pratt, it was implied that we were telling people that the bus service had been cut. I would just like to read the first line of the petition:

We the undersigned protest on the proposed cancellation of bus route 769 and 768.

The public understand it, we understand it; only Mr Hargreaves does not.

Federal funding cuts

Debate resumed.

Mrs Dunne: I raise a point of order, Mr Speaker. I would like to seek your ruling on whether or not the Chief Minister's amendment is in order because it substantially varies from the substance of Mr Seselja's initial motion. There is substantial discussion in the Chief Minister's amendment about housing affordability, the banks, the Reserve Bank, inflation. None of those matters were part of the original motion.

MR SPEAKER: Overall, Mrs Dunne, I think it is relevant if you just take a look at paragraph 1 (a) of Mr Seselja's motion, if I can comment about it on the wing. It talks about the Rudd Labor government's intentions to slash funding. The opening paragraph of Mr Stanhope's amendment goes to the issue of the threats presented to the national and regional economies, including the ACT. I think it is relevant.

MR SMYTH (Brindabella) (4.08): This is a very important motion that the Leader of the Opposition has put forward because it goes to the heart of what we do as members of this Assembly and what some of us do not do. What some, particularly those in the Labor Party, will not do is stand up to their federal Labor colleagues and say that these cuts are unnecessary, they are unwarranted and they will have a detrimental effect on the ACT—on the people they purport to represent, the working families in Canberra, on the ACT economy and indeed on how people view Canberra around this country.

It is interesting that the Chief Minister has scurried away from the chamber again, as he so often does. He is very good at dishing it out, but he cannot sit there and refute what we will now say. We will now point out the fallacies in his case and the fundamental lack of understanding by this Chief Minister and Treasurer of what the Reserve Bank does.

It is interesting that he starts with legacies. He says that there is the legacy of inflation that has been left by the previous Liberal government. I will get to that in a minute, but let us remember the legacy: record low unemployment, no debt, enormous surpluses, virtually unheard of in the history of this country, and a high investment—probably higher than any other government since the last major Liberal government that invested in Canberra, the Menzies government—in the infrastructure in Canberra. The legacy that he wants to refer to does not contain the upgrade of the Federal Highway, the Barton Highway; upgrades of the runway at the airport; three upgrades of the War Memorial, including a new wing; the National Library annex down at Hume; the building of the National Museum of Australia; the building of, and currently it is still underway, the National Portrait Gallery; the upgrade to the Mint; the expansion and upgrade of the National Gallery; the National Capital Exhibition on Regatta Point upgrade; the Old Parliament House upgrade; the construction of Reconciliation Place; the construction of Commonwealth Place; and the construction of Magna Carta Place, which he did not mention.

Yes, John Howard did not live here—that is true—and the people that stood up to him the most were the former Liberal government and the former Liberal Chief Minister,

who made a great point of that. Yes, Kevin Rudd now lives in Canberra—and look what he is doing to Canberra. So work out what you would prefer. You have to put this in context. When the Liberal government came to office in 1996, Beazley's black hole of a \$10 billion deficit that was not revealed and the \$100 billion worth of debt that the government owed—

Members interjecting—

Mr TEMPORARY DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Gentleman): Order!

MR SMYTH: and, when Mr Rudd came to office, no debt, no net government debt, no government debt, and a \$17 billion surplus. You tell me what you would prefer. If you want the litany of good things of the Howard government to continue, we can talk about the National Emergency Services Memorial, we can talk about the National Police Memorial, we can talk about the Anzac Parade upgrade. But I do not think we have to, because I think people in their hearts know that the Howard government, despite the fact that he did not live here, invested strongly in the ACT. In fact, despite the way this government are squeezing landholders and landowners and those who seek to buy land in the ACT, it is federal investment from the previous government in public service buildings, to make sure that our public servants are housed appropriately, that is feeding some of the billion-dollar surplus that this government has.

The Chief Minister has abandoned the field; he has just left the room. His amendment to the motion does not have a single mention of standing up for Canberra. There is not a single announcement that he can point to where he has stuck it to the Rudd federal government. You have got to admire the chief cheerleader for the Rudd government over there in the form of Mr Barr. Even Kate Lundy the senator said of Mr Barr's interpretation of the cuts to the travelling program: "I think that is a very positive interpretation. I admire Andrew Barr greatly. You have got to try and draw the positives out of it."

Well, it is a long bow that he has drawn and it is an appalling bow, because what Mr Barr fundamentally misses is that the travelling exhibitions of places like the War Memorial, the National Gallery, the National Library and Questacon go to places where people cannot normally get to Canberra. Because these things are withdrawn it does not mean that they will come here. They cannot afford to; they go to rural areas, they go to regional areas, they go to disadvantaged Aboriginal communities, they do it over the air. Questacon run a program where they often use the School of the Air to get to disadvantaged communities. Talk to your colleague Ms Porter; she knows where they are, she knows how far away they are, and she knows they do not get to come to Canberra—and that was the whole point of the outreach.

So if you, minister for education, and you, minister for tourism, think that disadvantaging—

MR TEMPORARY DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Mr Smyth, direct your comments through the chair.

MR SMYTH: Aboriginal kids in Queensland and Northern Territory is okay, all you are is a joke and you will be known as the chief cheerleader for the Rudd government.

Let us go through the amendment as moved by Mr Stanhope. The first paragraph “notes the actions already taken and the announced intentions of the Commonwealth Government to address as a top priority the threats presented to the national and regional economies”. Well, what about the wasted years of the Stanhope government and their lack of anything done to diversify the ACT economy? We have a Chief Minister who has lamented and moaned about his narrow economic base. What have you done about it? You are the Chief Minister, you have had a billion-dollar boom, you have more money than any other Chief Minister has ever had in the history of this place—and you have done nothing to secure the ACT’s economic future.

Then we go to paragraph 2 (c): “the ACT Government’s increased focus on housing affordability to assist in meeting pressures on those seeking to enter the ACT housing market and stay in it”. I just simply go back to the “squeeze them until they bleed but not till they die” comment. The government is outed well and truly by the state report on housing affordability from the UDIA, which says that, while the government are making adjustments, one, their processes are too long and convoluted and, two, they have squeezed the land supply. They say:

The challenge for the Australian Capital Territory Government is to improve affordability for those entering the market without causing a price collapse in the wider market. Improving land supply and assessment processes and permitting changes to the mix and size of products that can be offered are all part of the steps that need to be taken.

And, yes, Mr Corbell’s strategy has been totally discredited and the government is now scrabbling around to try to make up lost ground.

We should go to what the Chief Minister had to say. The substantive motion has a focus on the adverse impacts of decisions that have been made by and are in prospect from the Rudd government and it seeks the response of the Stanhope government to these cuts. Unfortunately, the motion has essentially been hijacked by the government through the amendment of the Chief Minister. Following that hijacking, the Chief Minister went on an extensive rant this morning about all sorts of things that may not even be pertinent. This is of course the way of the Chief Minister—and then he abandons the chamber, as he so often does, because he likes to dish it out but he simply cannot take it.

The Chief Minister spent considerable time talking about 12 increases in what he called the official interest rate, and it is time for a short lesson in economics for the Chief Minister.

Mr Barr: From you! You are the biggest ignoramus in the Assembly.

MR TEMPORARY DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order!

MR SMYTH: And, by the way, there is an error in the amendment; it should be “official”, not “officials”. It is worth reminding the Chief Minister that what the

Reserve Bank has changed is not the official interest rate—and the minister with the economics degree should know this. It is not the official interest rate, and you know that—or you should. It is far from it. There are many interest rates—the large business borrowing rate, the small business borrowing rate, the housing interest rate, the credit card rate, the cash rate, the overdraft rate. There are many rates in the market but the Reserve Bank has changed the cash rate—that is the rate at which it charges the major banks for lending funds to those banks.

Mr Seselja: That is embarrassing.

MR SMYTH: How embarrassing is correct. The decision announced at the board meeting was to raise it by 25 basis points to 7.25 effective 5 March 2008. So what we are talking about is the cash rate, even though you do not seem to understand that, Chief Minister, and clearly Mr Barr has just exposed his ignorance, the man with the economics degree; he does not even know this. Then you spent considerable time talking about the impact—

Mr Barr: I just said I would not stand for you lecturing anyone on economics, because you are an ignoramus.

MR TEMPORARY DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order, members!

MR SMYTH: of the increase in interest rates on struggling home buyers and others. The clear implication in your ranting was that the Howard government—

Mr Barr: You are the most embarrassing and least qualified person—

Mr TEMPORARY DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Mr Smyth—

MR SMYTH: caused the interest rate to escalate and as a result—

Mr Barr: to fill the role of shadow Treasurer in the history of this place.

MR TEMPORARY DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Mr Smyth, could you take your seat for a moment, please. Minister Barr, I have called you to order several times. Stop the conversations across the chamber, please.

Mr Barr: I am sorry, Mr Temporary Deputy Speaker.

MR SMYTH: Thank you, Mr Temporary Deputy Speaker. The other important thing to remind people is that the current cash rate is 12.75 percentage points below the 18 per cent imposed by the former Keating government in 1990 on Australian households and businesses. There is the lesson: 18 per cent down to 7.25 per cent. The Chief Minister's comments are quite simplistic; they do not understand what the Reserve Bank says and I think in that regard the Chief Minister ought to read the statements of the Reserve Bank at what is causing this. It is consumer spend that is causing it.

MR BARR (Molonglo—Minister for Education and Training, Minister for Planning, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Recreation, Minister for Industrial Relations) (4.18):

Having the would-be Professor Smyth seek to lecture people in this place on economics is the biggest joke. The irony in all of this is that, throughout the period of the former federal government, efficiency dividends were standard and routine practice. One need only go back to the 1997 budget to indicate that a two per cent efficiency dividend featured there and continued throughout.

I go to the financial statements and the additional budget estimates of the National Museum of Australia in 2005-06 where they make the point that the efficiency dividend that was asked of them during that period was 1.25 per cent; that was an increase in the 2005-06 year. What did they say? They said there was a reduction in the appropriation revenue but the museum did not expect this to have a significant impact on operations.

So for those opposite to begin this campaign and say that efficiency dividends are a new thing or are not something that the previous federal Liberal government sought in every budget year from these same national institutions goes to highlight the extreme ignorance of the shadow Treasurer in terms of responsible budget management. It is entirely inconsistent. I missed the shock and outrage and the series of media statements from those opposite when in every federal budget from 1996 right through to the last one an efficiency dividend was required from these national institutions.

Senator Carr asked a question on notice about the efficiency dividend in Senate estimates in relation to the 2005-06 budget, and asked a range of questions of the National Gallery including what was the financial impact of the efficiency dividend in terms of the financial year and out years and what would the impact of this be. It is interesting that the answer at the time from the National Gallery was:

The impact of the efficiency dividend on various components of the Gallery's operations has been taken into account in its planning processes over the years, along with parameter adjustments.

The Gallery is required to manage the delivery of outcomes and outputs within its resource allocations.

The Gallery has not planned to cut any specific programs as a result of the efficiency dividend.

The Gallery will continue to provide core functions.

The Gallery does not anticipate difficulties in attracting and retaining high quality staff as a result of the efficiency dividend.

That was in 2005. I will happily table that question on notice and the answer. So, for all of the indignation and all of the outrage of those opposite, I wonder where they were in 1996-97, 1997-98, 1998-99, 2000-01 and through every budget of the previous federal Liberal government—right up to the last one. Efficiency dividends have been required of these national institutions every year. So to suggest that this is some sort of new and significant imposition on these organisations is clearly not true.

What was also missing in the opposition's presentation on this motion was the reason why the Rudd government is pursuing efficiency dividends—the risk to Canberra

households and Australian households caused by the rises in interest rates as a result of the legacy of the Howard government. When those who pay closer attention to these matters look at the statements of the Leader of the Opposition, they will see his new-found concerns as he has assumed that role. He talked about housing affordability and the impact of higher interest rates on young families certainly at the beginning, but he has neglected to mention any of that today. In his 15 minutes this morning he did not speak on the issue; he did not mention the impact of the Howard government's inflationary spending on Canberra families. He did not mention the words "interest rates", "inflation", "mortgage" or "family", but these are the things that this debate is really about.

Of course the ACT government does not want to see any diminution of the tourism experience provided by the national institutions. We will continue to work closely with them in marketing their major events. When I was responding to the question that I was asked on ABC radio about the potential impact on tourism of cuts to national institutions in the ACT, I indicated that our experience was that, when major events were offered by the national institutions and they were only offered in Canberra, we received a significant increase in visitation—and that is an accurate statement. For example, the Turner to Monet exhibition that commences at the National Gallery very soon is only available for viewing in Canberra. If it was going to the art gallery in Sydney or the National Gallery of Victoria, we would have no chance of marketing that effectively to Sydney and Melbourne. We will receive a significant increase in visitation to the ACT as a result of the fact that we exclusively have this exhibition.

So from a tourism perspective the fact that some of these major blockbusters may not go on the road will in fact be a good thing for Canberra. What will be a bad thing for Canberra, though—and I am very happy to state this—is if the efficiency dividends are applied disproportionately in areas of marketing and promotion of the national institutions in terms of their own marketing and promotion budgets. We work in collaboration with them around major events like Floriade. We have an event trail; we partner with them. This year the theme for Floriade is Australian film so we are looking forward to and will partner with the National Film and Sound Archive and a range of other national institutions in the delivery of that particular event.

I will argue very strongly, not only with the federal minister but also with the agencies concerned who have the responsibility to implement the efficiency dividend, to ensure that the impact is not felt on the tourism experience in the ACT and that they are able to continue to work with the ACT government around the promotion of major events and activities. It is important that that work continues, and we will continue to support it through Australian Capital Tourism. One need only go and look at visitcanberra.com.au right now to see the amount of promotional work, the amount of extra work, that we undertake with the national institutions to promote Canberra as a tourist destination.

There is no doubt that those institutions are a major driver of tourism to Canberra and that is why we strongly support them and we continue to work with them. To suggest that an efficiency dividend this year is any different from the efficiency dividend that was sought from those organisations every year under the previous government, and

that this one is going to bring down these institutions as tourism providers for Canberra, is a ridiculous proposition. In fact, one needs to look at the attitude of the shadow Treasurer. Does he believe that there should be no efficiency dividends ever for government agencies?

Mr Smyth: I haven't said that. You make these things up.

MR BARR: He has not said that. So you support the 11 previous ones—just not this one?

Mr Seselja: What about the NCA cuts, Andrew?

Mr Smyth: You make these things up.

MR BARR: It is just not this one that you support. You just happen to not support this efficiency dividend—

Mr Seselja: You don't want to talk about the NCA cuts?

MR BARR: but you supported all of the other efficiency dividends.

MR SPEAKER: Order! Let us not turn it into a conversation.

MR BARR: Sorry, Mr Speaker. I apologise, but it is very clear the hypocrisy of those opposite—to have said nothing for 11 years when this efficiency dividend was applied to these same institutions and yet just scream blue murder this year. Why is that? Why is it that after 11 years of efficiency dividends they have suddenly woken up to the fact that there are efficiency dividends required of government agencies? I will say consistently, and I apply it to my own agencies within the ACT government, that efficiency dividends are an important way to drive reform and effectiveness in public sector service delivery, and if you want to be able to deliver programs more effectively, deliver more programs and do all of the things that you want to do, you need to ensure that you are using the resources you have efficiently. That is important for all public sector organisations; it was important throughout the 11 years of the previous government and remains important now.

My concern is that those opposite remained mute throughout that entire 11-year period and yet suddenly they have discovered that they do not like efficiency dividends any more. If that is going to signal their approach to budget management in the territory, the former shadow Treasurer Mr Mulcahy was absolutely spot-on when he said that this Liberal opposition is not fit for government. The only person—

Mrs Dunne: Tell me now. You need another ally, do you?

MR BARR: I said it before in this place when he was sitting over there that I felt very sorry for Mr Mulcahy as shadow Treasurer—that he was surrounded by a bunch of colleagues who had no economic understanding. Mr Smyth, the alternative Treasurer, struggles with the concept of diminishing marginal return, and that is a real problem for someone who purports to be the alternative Treasurer in this place.

MR PRATT (Brindabella) (4.28): It is lovely to see the new love affair between Mr Barr and the new independent Labor member for Molonglo in terms of his economic credentials.

Mrs Burke: He might as well be.

MR PRATT: Yes, indeed. I stand to support the Leader of the Opposition's motion. I congratulate him for bringing this forward and totally reject the Chief Minister's amendments, the typical 99 per cent razor-gang approach to amending motions.

The impact on the ACT of the Rudd government's funding cuts to departments and their projects and programs are far reaching. These cuts are unwarranted and are unjustified. I also note, by the way, that Mr Stanhope, lacking any spine, will not stand up to his federal comrades on this particular matter. I notice, by the way, that the Chief Minister is not even here. He is happy to do his cruet and dish it out before lunch but has not got the courage to come down here and face the ongoing debate. I do not see the Chief Minister bracing up Senator Lundy for her rather cynical attacks on the NCA, the appalling attacks which created the climate and allowed Prime Minister Rudd to move in and make the cuts that he has made.

Common sense on the part of the federal government would surely dictate that cuts to operating budgets and capital expenditure be initiated with some idea and recognition of their effects. In the case of the Griffin legacy cuts, there has been no explanation or apology whatsoever. We have seen the same lack of recognition and apology from the Stanhope government when it came to our own horror budget two years ago and the "necessary pain" of school closures and the slashing of front-line services that accompanied them.

The cuts to the NCA and the slashing of \$46 million from the Griffin legacy mean that one of the key developments in the plan, to revitalise Civic, turning Constitution Avenue into a grand boulevard linking Civic with Russell, will be shelved indefinitely. Our roads are currently overburdened, to say the least, and these sorts of cuts will not alleviate that particular problem. The obvious effect of the loss of the Constitution Avenue upgrade will be extra traffic congestion, resulting from new offices and redevelopments between Civic and Russell, something which was supposed to be created to alleviate the upgrades.

We rely on federal funding to underpin the improvement of our road network. With the culling of NCA-funded works, will AusLink be next? I would like to see an explanation from the other side on their confidence about the ongoing AusLink program. Last year, the ACT government handed over to the commonwealth control of Constitution Avenue, Commonwealth Avenue, State Circle, Kings Avenue and sections of Parkes Way and other streets. In return, the commonwealth committed to capital works and \$3 million a year for ongoing maintenance. Will this funding now be compromised too? Will we be left to carry the burden of an ageing road system that has currently no forward planning?

We have seen the Stanhope government abandon former Chief Minister Humphries's five-year road funding plan. What federal roads assistance programs will be cut too?

The ill thought-out, slap-dash plan to turn the lake foreshore into a car park is an example of the lack of forward thinking and knee-jerk mentality of the Stanhope government. This car park has already turned a 10-minute journey across Commonwealth Avenue bridge into a 20-minute push and shove nightmare, as everyone jostles their way out of this so-called car park, at 5.30 daily. Again, it is an example of the overburdened road system, not helped by the slashing of commonwealth funding.

We have traffic at a standstill on every major arterial road in the territory during peak times. Anecdotal evidence suggests that our commuting time into Civic has doubled in the last few months. And what does the Stanhope government do to alleviate these problems? They spend time and money on unnecessary artworks for the black hole that we call the Gungahlin Drive extension.

We are a far cry from the serene grand city that Walter Burley Griffin had envisaged to be the nation's capital. While we are at the mercy of the commonwealth in a lot of areas, it is incumbent upon the local government of the day to counter the impact of federal government cuts, to drive a hard bargain to increase federal funding and to exercise vision and forethought when it comes to basic infrastructure, upkeep and planning. Our roads and our basic infrastructure are approaching 40 to 50 years of age, and these issues must heavily depend on commonwealth funding assistance.

Let me now respond, if I may, please, to Mr Stanhope's comments about the Howard government's impact on Canberra families, which he lashed the chamber long and hard with before lunch. The Chief Minister criticised the federal Liberal Party about the impact on ACT families. He laments federal government policy and of course exaggerates the federal government's role in previous years. He totally ignores the role that his government has played in the impact on Canberra families, and I will return to this matter shortly.

Mr Stanhope opened up this debate by concentrating on the impact of government policy on ACT families. He opened it up but he failed to do so with balance and of course he fails to sit here now to participate in the debate. You might just argue that the federal Liberal government took its eye off the ball in respect of interest rates and inflation in the last couple of years. You might, but you would probably be fairly tough even in going that far.

But to condemn that government, the Howard government, as the total cause of such an impact on the ACT is both dishonest and simply a case of Howard hating. To not recognise that the federal Liberal government, in its first nine years at least, brought greater prosperity to Canberra families and indeed continued that prosperity in their years 10 and 11 and in fact not to recognise that Howard reversed the macro damage rent upon our community in the Keating years is a gross act of dishonesty on the part of Mr Stanhope.

Where do we start? Howard brought interest rates down to give more Canberra families access to borrowings and to be able to afford to buy a house. Secondly, Howard brought unemployment down and put more Canberrans in jobs, to make many more Canberrans prosperous, to give more Canberrans, therefore, a fighting

chance to purchase a house. Howard brought additional funding because of their macro policies. The government brought additional prosperity because of their macro policies which increased Australia's prosperity to put into ACT roads and into ACT schooling.

The Stanhope government did not bring down interest rates. The federal Liberals did. The Stanhope government did not cut Keating's \$96 billion dollar deficit, which allowed the introduction of a GST, which the ACT community has enjoyed major benefits from. The Howard government did that. The Stanhope government did not increase the commonwealth funding flows to ACT schools; this government, the ACT government, could only increase funding to schools by destroying 23 schools and damaging their communities, after lying that they would not even close schools. The Stanhope government did not continue to build on that Howard-delivered prosperity for the ACT community.

MR SPEAKER: Withdraw that, the "lying".

MR PRATT: I withdraw that, Mr Speaker.

The Stanhope government did not build on the Howard-delivered prosperity to the ACT community in the last two years about which Mr Stanhope is particularly critical. Howard did. Unemployment came down; tax cuts were delivered to Canberra families. In the close of his government, \$10 million was pledged to Tharwa Drive and other works, after years of Stanhope neglect on those issues alone.

We have seen, of course, further GSTs to the ACT. All of these are resources made available to this government to support ACT families as a consequence of good federal funding policy. Commonwealth assistance, commonwealth funding, provided this government with the wherewithal to do a lot more to assist ACT families. Mr Stanhope, who opened this debate on the impacts on ACT families, failed to be balanced in that.

Whilst Howard was bringing prosperity to ACT families, what was Mr Stanhope's impact? Firstly, despite the billion dollar boom, we had more rates and increased charges and imposts—a fire levy and an increase in paid parking. We have seen the rundown of ACT roads infrastructure, families increasingly caught up in traffic jams, while the Chief Minister fiddles. Witness the incompetence which is the Gungahlin Drive extension. Bus services were threatened to be cut. Bus services were certainly cut in late 2006 as a consequence of the irresponsible rationalisation program. And there were school closures, library closures, ACT shopfront closures. This Chief Minister has exercised hypocrisy in attacking the federal government. (*Time expired.*)

DR FOSKEY (Molonglo) (4.38): It looks as though hypocrisy is alive and well on both sides of this house today. I am going to speak both to the original motion and to the amendment. It does seem to me, Mr Speaker, that, despite your ruling, it makes a mockery of debate in this Assembly of the legitimate putting forward of a motion if an amendment can be put forward which basically changes the whole spirit of that motion in order to allow, in this case, the government to debate those issues that it wants.

I believe that that has been the strategy today. Consequently, I eschew the amendment. It makes me wonder why we bother to have private members business day, which I believe in and support, if it is turned into a circus like this. That is what seems to me to be happening.

I am going to try to take an approach to this motion and, to some extent, the amendment as though it was put forward seriously. I would like to think that we are actually here saying what we think and believe is for the betterment of Canberra, not for the one-upmanship of “my party is better than yours; my government is better than yours was”, which is basically what this debate has boiled down to.

Before I go anywhere, let us consider: when cuts are made to Canberra’s institutions and to the NCA, who is affected? Not just Canberra but the whole of Australia! And I do not hear anybody here making that point today. Whose national institutions are they? They are not just Canberra’s. They are not just here for our tourist industry, believe it or not, though they certainly help our tourist industry. I believe they are pretty well what our tourist industry is based around. And I do not know that people would come here if we were just a provincial country town, which we would be if we were not the national capital. So let us remember that, when we argue for proper funding of these institutions, we are arguing on behalf of all Australians.

What kind of job does the National Library do? Without that, our national history would not be safeguarded. If all those documents of those people who become more and more important to us—the Judith Wrights of this world, all the other forgotten poets, all the writers, all the people whose documents are there—cannot be looked after, where is our history? It makes it very much easier for a future government to tell the history as they want it, to talk about black-armband versions and to outlaw anything which they do not like and which does not suit their political agenda.

I think that we are finding here today that efficiency dividends have always been made at Canberra’s expense. It is true. The previous government did it, and the one before that and the one before that. But currently we are talking about the Rudd government. Why do they do it? For a start, they do it because the media enhances this idea that Canberra is just a place full of politicians. They do not think about the people who live here, nor do they appreciate that their national capital is their national capital. And that may be something that needs to be talked up, not just by this government but by the Rudd Government. It is theirs; it is not ours in that sense.

The second reason why governments do that depends pretty much on how the voting works in this territory. We have a very predictable outcome: we will always elect two Labor Party members to the House of Reps, while there are two seats. We know that, when there was a third, it was marginal. We will elect one Liberal and one Labor Party senator. The Greens are making inroads into that. Mr Smyth was in the lower house. I believe there was a third seat at that time.

Mr Smyth: No, two seats.

DR FOSKEY: I apologise to Mr Smyth. I would like to see those seats become marginal again because I think that is what makes government sit up and listen. It is the way it goes; that is politics.

We know that Eden Monaro is a marginal seat and we know that they sit up and listen to it. Why are the airport owners more concerned about the views of people in Queanbeyan and Eden Monaro in relation to their political representative than they are about the ACT? It is politics, mate.

If we are going to be really serious about this, I think that, again, on behalf of the whole of Australia, we should be defending these institutions, not just because they bring tourists here. If we do not, no-one will. I am sorry, it just so happens that most people in Australia do not realise how important the National Gallery, the National Archives, the National Library and the National Botanic Gardens are. In fact, I thought, “Maybe the best analysis is if we look at the actual benefit of these institutions.”

First of all, let us look at the events that the NCA conducts. Mostly, I think these benefit Canberra people. It is a sort of gift that the NCA gives us for living in the national capital. For instance, I do not think people travel from Sydney for our Tropfest and some of the other events. I see those as being events for Canberra, and good on them. It saves the ACT government money; it utilises that parliamentary triangle, which can be a very godforsaken place, especially on a windy, cold day.

If they do not cover them, then who does? Do we let them drop or does the ACT government pick them up? Those are questions we need to be talking about here today, not putting out spurious amendments based on interest rate cuts.

I heard Mr Rudd this morning on the radio taking responsibility for the interest rate rises. We might find it is not as easy to keep if Mr Rudd himself is taking responsibility. We cannot keep blaming the previous government forever and ever. At some point that has to stop. Mr Rudd appears to have drawn a line under that already.

Some of these events benefit Canberra alone. Will the ACT government step in? Will we consider some kind of cost recovery? My daughter—mind you, she is only 18 but is old enough to vote—said, “Why don’t they charge people a gold coin for entrance to the Tropfest?” Shock, horror! Maybe that is a point; I do not know. I put that out there.

I wonder what the ACT government would be saying if the NCA funded Floriade. I reckon there would be a bit of a fuss being made about that if we had to pick up the bill for that. I commend the ACT government for the fact that it does fund Floriade. I wonder what the effect will be of the NCA’s cuts in terms of Floriade. I would like to hear the cost-benefit analysis there.

Some of the institutions that are managed for the nation are the museum, the archives, the library and, I believe, even the National Capital Authority, in its brief of looking after that aspect of Canberra which is the national capital. So we need to be getting the rest of Australia concerned. It is not just the fat cats in Canberra that are suffering from these cuts; it is the whole of Australia.

Thirdly, which things are for Australians, not just because it is the national capital but because these are good things to have? And some of those, I think, include the very

place itself—the amenities of the lake and the parks and all of the others, the Griffin plan and so on. Canberra used to be, and it could still be, a model city. I think the Griffin legacy was keeping us in that mould. I think it would be tragedy if that got left.

Remember that even Griffin's plan got left for decades until Menzies came in and picked it up again and said, "It is worth spending money on Canberra. It is worth the Australian taxpayers' money being spent on Canberra because it is the national capital and it matters." Not only that, it provides a model. It used to be best practice in planning and development, and the NCDC was part of that. I am sure there are people in the NCA who still have that motivation. Instead of going, "I am black, you are white," we need to actually use this place to have a discussion because basically we all care about Canberra. It seems to get forgotten.

It is a sorry day if we are going to see more amendments like this. They have almost no relativity to the motion at hand and skew the debate and make me wonder why we even bothered coming.

MR MULCAHY (Molonglo) (4.48): There is some sense in what Dr Foskey just said, although I guess it is a very optimistic view of the world that that sort of approach would be taken in this place. We did see this morning a moderate approach in relation to another matter, so there might be hope yet.

I welcome Mr Seselja's motion today and will speak to that original motion and the Chief Minister's amendment cognately. I support Mr Seselja's original motion, but I cannot support the amendment put forward by the Chief Minister. Although I do agree with some of the elements in the second point in the amendment, to dismiss current inflationary pressures as a legacy of the Howard government is incorrect, is simplistic and is nothing more than a political line. It discredits the entire amendment.

Honestly, how could anyone put up a proposal that talks about the bitter legacy of Liberal Party financial mismanagement? I can understand it from someone who is young, like the minister for education, but Mr Stanhope is older than I. If he cannot remember what serious commonwealth financial mismanagement was, then I fear he is losing his memory, because I can remember it. I can remember that, in 1974, we thought it was pretty amazing that your pay packet changed every two weeks because the price of wages was going through the roof. I did not own any property then and credit cards were a new thing, but those in business who coped with the 18, 20, 22 per cent borrowing rates would tell you about economic disasters under the Whitlam government.

Mr Barr: What was Howard's last rate when he was Treasurer?

MR MULCAHY: Howard's last rate when he was Treasurer was not 22 per cent.

The dramas that Australia experienced back in the early 1990s are emblazoned on the minds of many families who saw businesses fail. I simply cannot accept a proposition that Australia is in the middle of an economic disaster. Yes, there are inflationary pressures. But unless you are living in a complete state of isolation, to ignore the events going on on the world economic stage at the moment, to ignore the impact of

subprime lending on institutions, not just in the United States but in other countries including Australia, simply defies logic. The problems that are besetting the French economy, the German economy, the US economy, which is still a powerhouse economy in global terms and which, when things go down, will drag others down with it, cannot be dismissed.

We have to recognise that Australia has actually done very well. We resisted the Asian economic meltdown. I remain convinced that in this case the Australian Treasury advice, which was adhered to, played a significant role in protecting Australian families and businesses from what would have been potentially a disastrous outcome.

One of the main points in the original motion goes to an important issue for many ACT residents: federal cuts to cultural institutions located in Canberra. It is not unreasonable to ask the government what it has done or what it plans to do in response to these cuts. Similarly, it is safe to assume that, if the coalition was still in power nationally, the Stanhope government would be much more vocal in leading the charge against these cuts.

Canberra, of course, has been historically a government town; it is the reason for the formation of the town; and even though the ACT has grown and developed significantly there is no denying the heavy influence of the Australian public service on the territory's economic profile and population. According to the 2006-07 *State of the service* report by the Australian Public Service Commission, there were 143,525 ongoing employees in the APS as at June 2007 and there were another 11,957 non-ongoing employees, contractors and the like. Of these numbers, over one-third of the ongoing employees are located in Canberra. This equates to around 51,240 people employed in the public service in the ACT.

Whilst I recognise, as Mr Seselja's motion does, that any cuts to the APS have a clear ability to impact on the ACT, I would be more hesitant in criticising reductions and efficiencies in government. It is slightly ironic that the Liberal Party, a party that has always been committed to responsible and minimal government, is leading the charge against cuts to the public sector.

I believe that governments at the territory and national levels should always be prepared to locate efficiencies and to look to reduce the size of government. I always thought this was a core principle of the Liberal Party, although things may of course have changed since my departure in December.

I have not heard details as to the amount of jobs, if any, which will be lost because of the federal government's planned cuts to cultural institutions and other savings, so it is difficult to predict exactly any impact to Canberra residents or the local economy. But I do acknowledge that this impact is potentially significant.

I agree with the Chief Minister's comments and his media statement today that it is important to be proactive and to plan ahead for any future cuts, and any cuts to the ACT will have an impact on employment in the ACT. But I am far from convinced that, with unemployment at a record low of just 2.3 per cent, the territory is on the

verge of an employment crisis. I know from meetings with the recruitment industry, for example, that the biggest problem they face is finding people to fill vacancies, not finding vacancies for applicants.

Having said that, I do question the Rudd government's cuts to the cultural institutions and do recognise the significant impact of these cuts on the Canberra community. But I must say that I do not see anything wrong with seeking efficiencies in government. I think there is a duty on all elected representatives in any government to manage the expenditures of government and exercise restraint.

I understand that some \$5.851 million will be cut from the Federal Department of Environment, Heritage Water and the Arts in 2008-09. This translates to \$196,000 from the National Gallery's budget, \$269,000 from the National Library and \$188,000 from the National Museum. These amounts increase over the outyears, and there is no doubt that they will have some impact on the services that these institutions offer.

Unfortunately, Canberra will feel the greatest impact from these particular cuts to the services that are offered by the national institutions, notwithstanding Dr Foskey's point that they are essentially there for all Australians. The national institutions are tremendous assets for the territory; we are fortunate to have them and to have had them constructed—particularly, as was pointed out, as much of this was driven by the late Sir Robert Menzies. Not only are they great places for local residents to visit but they are significant tourist destinations; they help attract people to Canberra. I know that they drive up accommodation occupancy in the ACT, particularly those things out at the National Gallery.

Their budgets, in the scheme of total federal government spending, are relatively small but these cuts, I fear, will have an impact on the services they are able to offer. While efficiencies as a rule are a good thing, they must be made for a purpose, not just to make a symbolic gesture.

I was a little startled to hear Mr Barr on the radio, when these cuts were first announced, trying to spin them as potentially good for the ACT. I think this is a bridge too far and a position that he would not have taken prior to 24 November or if the coalition was in government federally.

The ACT is heavily influenced by the federal government and changes to the Australian public service. A quote from the Chief Minister used in Mr Seselja's motion is accurate: to an extent the ACT is susceptible to drastic shifts in policy at a federal level. The ACT must continue to develop; it must continue to mature and become less reliant over time on the federal government. However, it is a fact of life that, when over 50,000 people of a total population of just 340,000 work in the Australian public service, significant changes in direction by the federal government will have an impact on the ACT.

I support the original motion's calls for the ACT government to detail what they will do to counter or minimise the impact of any potential cuts and do note the Chief Minister's point about working with the commonwealth and the Business Council to absorb and ameliorate possible impacts of job losses in the ACT because the full

scope of going beyond cultural institutions is yet to be absolutely clarified from the work of the finance minister, Mr Tanner.

It appears that there will be cuts to the APS, although the extent is not known, and although this in itself is not necessarily a bad thing, the impact on Canberra could be serious. It is important that, if cuts are to happen, we are ready for them and that the ACT government works cooperatively with the commonwealth to be prepared to absorb these workers into the local economy.

Without knowing all of the detail, it is impossible to say what can be cut from the APS, but I do not believe that we should be simply opposing any efficiencies just for the sake of it. I believe that Canberra's employment market is still remarkably strong and that the construction and property markets will continue to be very strong for the foreseeable future, certainly for the next probably two years at least. Although it is true that the ACT is susceptible to changes at the federal level, I believe that the ACT is in a strong position to react to any cuts to the APS.

It is, as I said, disappointing that the Rudd government has targeted national institutions. I do not believe that these cuts are entirely justified by economic necessity and they do warrant some criticism from this Assembly. I also believe that it is not unreasonable to expect the ACT government to be a little more vocal in defence of Canberra. Certainly the Chief Minister and the rest of the government never hesitated in criticising our government. (*Time expired.*)

MRS DUNNE (Ginninderra) (4.58): I am happy to support Mr Seselja's motion and to speak against Mr Stanhope's predictable but quisling and toadying amendment.

Mr Barr: Where's Zed?

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! You can go and find him if you like, Mr Barr, but let us have a bit of order.

MRS DUNNE: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. We intended today to draw attention to the cuts made by the Rudd government and the impacts they will have, principally on our national institutions but also on the workforce in the ACT. It is important to reinforce the statement that the Chief Minister made at the ACT budget breakfast in 2007. He said then:

We are susceptible as a small jurisdiction in that we don't have our destiny entirely in our hands. Decisions that the Federal Government might make, particularly if there's a change of Government, could have significant impacts on employment levels or construction activity and our budget would suffer immediately.

As a consequence of the election of the Rudd Labor government, we have seen the signalling of significant cuts in the territory. We have seen cuts to national institutions. Mr Mulcahy is right: we do not know the full extent of that, but we do know that in excess of 30 people will go from the National Capital Authority, and not from areas where there is so-called duplication in planning matters. We know there will be more cuts to the National Capital Authority when they get around to their planning

review—their review of the work done by the National Capital Authority and whether there are overlaps in the planning area.

You have to remember, Mr Deputy Speaker, that these cuts to the National Capital Authority were made before they worked out what the authority did. These are the Senator Kate Lundy, Labor senator for the ACT, memorial cuts. It is squaring Kate away for not getting a job in the ministry: “What can we do? She’s been around for a long time, she’s got a fair few mates in the building industry. What can we do for Kate? I know; we’ll do what she asked and we’ll cut indiscriminately out of the National Capital Authority.” That is what has happened in that regard.

The performance of the minister for territories, when confronted with this, was abysmal and appalling. He had no idea what his department was doing, he had no idea what the National Capital Authority did or why it did it, and he had no defence. He did not say something indefensible; he just had no defence to offer regarding the cuts that were announced and are being made without looking into what the National Capital Authority does.

As Dr Foskey said, most of the money for the Griffin legacy has been taken away, which means there will not be a significant upgrading of Constitution Avenue. Basically the only thing that has remained in terms of capital works is the roundabout at Russell, which is a significant and important piece of roadwork which needs to be done as a matter of public safety.

We have seen a range of cuts that will have a significant impact on the territory. Mr Mulcahy is right: we should not be afraid of efficiencies and, in a climate when we have low levels of unemployment in the ACT, we should be able to do something to accommodate those people who find that their jobs in the commonwealth public service have suddenly disappeared. But the question is: what is this government doing about this? What is the Chief Minister doing about this? We hark back to what happened in 1996, when there were significant cuts in the territory following the election of the Howard government. I am proud to say that I worked for the people who stood up for Canberra. The Chief Minister, the Minister for Planning and the Deputy Chief Minister at the time went and thumped the table. They did get some concessions. They did not get as many concessions as they would have liked but they stood up for Canberra. They had the guts to criticise decisions that were not to the advantage of the ACT, unlike this Chief Minister, who is nothing more than a quisling when it comes to standing up to his mates in the Labor Party.

The clear message from this is that the Rudd government can ride roughshod over the Stanhope Labor government and they will just turn around and say, “Do it to me again.” The whole problem is that no-one has the guts to stand up and say, “Hey Kev, you’ve got it wrong.” This is not fair, it will have a disproportionate impact upon Canberra and they just do not care because they think that, no matter what the Rudd Labor government does in Canberra, people will keep voting Labor. They take the people of Canberra for granted and, as a result, Jon Stanhope comes out and says, “Well, it’s really very terrible but I understand their situation.”

We understood the situation in which the Howard government found itself when it was confronted with the Beazley black hole back in 1996, but it did not mean that we

did not stand up for Canberra. But the people that I worked for, the people who occupied the treasury bench at the time, stood up for Canberra. They got together with the business community and they thumped the tub. They went to see the Prime Minister as a group. It was not just a matter of being in a little hidey hole and saying, behind their hand, “Kev, can you do something about it?” which is what the Chief Minister has done.

Mr Seselja: Apparently; you can only take his word for it.

MRS DUNNE: Apparently—he says he has done it. But the Chief Minister at the time took the business community with her and visited the Prime Minister. She laid the case out regarding the impact it was having. I challenge the Chief Minister to do the same. I challenge the Chief Minister to take it up with his colleague the minister for environment and culture, Mr Garrett, and do something about the national institutions. I challenge him to take it up with the minister for the environment and do something about the fact that, although at the last election Rudd Labor promised substantial moneys to institutions like the National Botanic Gardens in order to fix their watering system, that money is not forthcoming.

With respect to the estimates process up on the hill earlier this week, Senator Lundy, before the last election, was saying: “This must happen. If it doesn’t happen now, all the trees at the National Botanic Gardens will turn up their toes and die.” And where is she today? This week, she has been asking questions about it and they are all saying, “Senator Lundy, we’ve got to talk to a few people and it’s going very well.” What does she do? She says, “I’ll come back and ask you about that again during the next estimates process.” She is not interested, now that she has been elected for another three years, in standing up for these national institutions. She has had her way. She has had her cuts to the organisation that she hated most in the territory, and she does not care about all those other commitments that she made before the last election.

The only people who will stand up for the people of Canberra, in and out of season, irrespective of who occupies the treasury bench in the federal parliament, are those in the Liberal Party. We were not afraid to stand up to a Liberal Prime Minister when he cut in Canberra—and he cut deep. Unlike this Chief Minister, who says that he has had something to say, but there is no proof of it—

Mr Seselja: What about the minister for tourism?

MRS DUNNE: Then you have the minister for tourism, as part of the cheer squad, making this absolutely indefensible excuse the other day: “This will be good for us.” It is like having a good whipping: what does not kill you will make you strong. That was basically the Andrew Barr defence the other day regarding cuts to the national institutions.

What we see here today, and what we have seen over the past few weeks, is a disgraceful, cowardly government who will not stand up to their Labor mates and who will not do anything in defence of the ACT. They then have the audacity to come in here and take Mr Seselja’s correct motion, a motion which is about the future of the ACT, and turn and twist with this pathetic amendment that vainly tries to shift the

subject to something on which Mr Stanhope thinks he can do better. If he wants to talk about housing affordability, as I said here earlier today, bring it on. Let us put Jon Stanhope's record on housing affordability on the—(*Time expired.*)

MR STEFANIAK (Ginninderra) (5.08): In supporting Mr Seselja's motion, I say firstly that I tend to think the Prime Minister might be overreacting in terms of what he is doing. Those of us in this house who are old enough to have lived through the Whitlam era will know that we came from having full employment during 23 years of coalition government to then seeing huge increases in wages, the cost of living and interest rates. Wages went up by 14 or 15 per cent and there were huge rises in inflation which took a while to get over, but that did occur. We can cast our minds back to the late eighties, when there were interest rates of 17 or 18 per cent, which really affected a hell of a lot of people, and high inflation. We now have an inflation rate of about four per cent, low interest rates, full employment, and an economy that survived the crash of the five Asian tigers in 1997.

I tend to think that some overreaction by the federal government has occurred here. You have to question, even after 102 days, the economic credibility of Rudd and his colleagues. As a country, I think we are in for a very hard time—and needlessly so. I think there is an element of panic and ignorance in what the federal government is doing. I make that point to start with.

Secondly, I am quite disappointed by what the Chief Minister has not done in relation to this matter. I would have expected him to be consistent. I would have expected him to come out, maybe not as rabidly as he did in criticising the Howard government, but at least strongly in terms of backing up the Canberra community. With respect to cuts, you do not just have two per cent cuts across the board. That is totally inefficient. There are some departments that can handle that quite easily and that could probably do more, while there are some who probably need a little extra money.

Mr Barr: Which ones?

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: Mr Barr, I have called you to order about three times. After me and Mr Hargreaves, you are the most Foghorn-ish Leghorn-ish MLA we have in the place. Will you quell your emotions and let us hear the debate.

MR STEFANIAK: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker; I can actually talk over him if need be. I would not have expected the Chief Minister to be quite as rabid as he was in relation to the Howard government, but at least he could have strongly criticised his own government and stood up for the people of Canberra, which is something that even Rosemary Follett might have done, as I recall, and Kate Carnell certainly did so with John Howard.

In expanding on what my colleague Mrs Dunne, who was a staffer at the time, talked about—and I entirely concur with what she said—it is amazing what you can do if you do stand up for the place, if you go in to bat and you keep harping at your federal colleagues that what they are doing is going over the top as far as you are concerned. If you think your constituents deserve a better deal, you can claw back the odd thing. And, yes, federal governments of any persuasion often tend to wipe over what

happens in this little place, but at the end of the day, if you are loud enough and strong enough in what you say, even the most intransigent federal government will do something. I can recall a number of areas in which we got some results, in those difficult days in 1995, 1996 and 1997, from the Howard government.

The Howard government inherited a much worse situation than what Howard gave to Rudd. They had the Beazley black hole—they had some huge problems with the economy and it took a long time to sort that out. Canberra had suffered under Hawke and Keating. They suffered cuts of about 9,000 or 10,000 public servants, and we got a cut of another 9,000 or 10,000 under Howard. They screamed in Newcastle when 2 ½ thousand were cut. In Canberra, though, we managed to overcome it and we were probably a lot stronger for it, funnily enough, at the end of the day. But the times then were even harder than they are now, and I am amazed at just how meek the Chief Minister is. Mr Barr—Foghorn Leghorn over there, according to you, Mr Deputy Speaker—is actually trying to make a plus out of it, by saying that maybe if you do not send travelling shows—

Mr Barr: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker: I think members are meant to refer to other members by their titles.

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: That is a correct point. Only I can use that particular term in any case, Mr Barr. Mr Stefaniak, will you refer to Mr Barr either by his title or by his name.

MR STEFANIAK: I certainly will, Mr Deputy Speaker. With respect to the economy, we have suffered far worse than what is occurring now. The economy is fundamentally in very good shape. I find it quite amazing for Mr Stanhope to be so meek about it. It is ridiculous that there are such significant cuts to major Canberra institutions like the National Capital Authority, the National Gallery of Australia and the National Museum of Australia—\$9 million worth of cuts over a three-year period to some fairly small institutions. They will have great trouble surviving those cuts and they will actually have to cut into programs. If you talk about saving \$9 million—and I think the figure of \$64 million is bandied about as representing the total savings so far from the ACT—that is a drop in the bucket when you are looking at savings Australia-wide. Again, it is not good value for your buck.

I thought Mr Barr was being disingenuous when he said, “If they stop all the travelling shows, more people will come to Canberra.” That is wrong, Mr Barr; it actually does not work like that. We want to promote this place. What the federal Labor government is doing represents appalling value for money. A cut of \$9 million over three years for three major but fairly small national institutions will have a huge impact here. You might save \$9 million but how much will we lose as a community with tourists not coming to Canberra, with the flow-on effect to business? Much more than \$9 million over three years. The Chief Minister was right—he often is not—in saying:

Decisions that the Federal Government might make, particularly if there’s a change of Government, could have significant impacts on employment levels or construction activity and our budget would suffer immediately.

That is what Rudd and his colleagues are doing. We are seeing in many cases fairly mindless cuts. If this was being done by the Howard government, the Chief Minister would be screaming from the rafters and complaining for all he is worth. But he is amazingly meek and there has been hardly any criticism at all in relation to his federal colleagues. I say to him: that is just not the way to do it. Your job is to stand up for the people of Canberra. It does not matter if your own party or the other party is in power federally. I have certainly been to a number of ministerial meetings where people in the same party go hammer and tongs at each other. In the good old days when there were very few Labor governments, there was a Labor federal government in 1995 and I think a Queensland Labor government, and everyone else was Liberal—

Mr Barr: New South Wales.

MR STEFANIAK: New South Wales were not there. There were two Labor ministers at an education conference in 1995, and I do not think Mr Aquilina was there. It was amazing. The rest of us, all Liberals, sat and watched the Queensland minister and the federal minister, Simon Crean, go hammer and tongs over an issue. The Queensland minister was not afraid of sticking up for the state of Queensland. It was a bit like watching a tennis match. He was rabid. It just shows what you need to do. I will give a few little hints: you do that as a minister; it is something I certainly did as a minister in terms of the federal Liberal government if they were trying to screw the ACT. You usually do it without success, but sometimes you might claw back a few million dollars, and that certainly helps. It is certainly something that Kate Carnell had down to a fine art in terms of having a go at a Liberal government that was making cuts which she felt were not in the interests of the ACT. I am certainly disappointed, to put it mildly—

Members interjecting—

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order on the opposition benches!

MR STEFANIAK: that this Chief Minister, who was so rabid when it came to criticising a federal Liberal government, is so silent now when it comes to criticising his own colleagues. That is fundamentally wrong. I would agree with Mr Mulcahy because we certainly believe in efficiencies and, yes, you always need to be on the lookout for where you can legitimately make savings. But you are an absolute fool if you make minor savings in small programs that give you a good bang for their buck, because you are going to lose a hell of a lot more money down the track. I do not have a problem with the Rudd government looking around for some efficiencies in some departments if they are there to be made, but when some of these savings are so miniscule and so stupid, it behoves the ACT government, and especially its Chief Minister, to go in to bat for the people of the ACT and not meekly accept it. I think Mr Seselja has brought forward a timely motion.

MR SESELJA (Molonglo—Leader of the Opposition) (5.18), in reply: It is interesting that we have had the input of Andrew Barr on this issue. He is fast getting a reputation as the chief cheerleader for the federal government—the minister for federal government propaganda. If Kevin Rudd says it is a good thing, Andrew Barr is

your man. He is the man to sell it to the people of Canberra, whether it is a good thing or a bad thing. When the chief cheerleader did speak, he did not speak about the NCA cuts. He kept talking about the efficiency dividends. I wonder how the minister would classify cutting 33 jobs out of 87. I wonder whether that could somehow be classified as an efficiency dividend. That looks to me like the gutting of an organisation.

Mr Barr: It depends how inefficient the organisation is.

MR SESELJA: The minister interjects, and we can take it from that interjection that he supports what Senator Lundy has had to say—that it was a bloated organisation that deserved to be slashed. It is good that we can finally get that out of the government because the Chief Minister has been silent on whether it is a bloated organisation that should have been slashed. But Minister Andrew Barr has now confirmed that he believes Senator Lundy was right when she said it was a bloated organisation and she was—

Mr Barr: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker: I said no such thing, and the Leader of the Opposition should withdraw that statement.

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: What is the point of order, Mr Barr?

MR SESELJA: There is no point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mr Barr: The Leader of the Opposition has deliberately misrepresented me, Mr Deputy Speaker.

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: Resume your seat, Mr Barr. You may use standing order 46 at the conclusion of this debate.

MR SESELJA: That was a spurious point of order from the minister. From the interjection, we can only suggest that he approves of what Senator Lundy said, and that was a ridiculous attack on the hardworking men and women in the NCA—saying that it was a bloated organisation and that it deserved to be slashed. This went well beyond efficiency dividends. We always suspected that it was not just Senator Lundy who held this view but that it was held by many Labor figures, and I think we are now starting to see why this occurred—because ACT Labor asked for it to occur. That is why this is the first cab off the rank. That is why the NCA was slashed in the way that it was—because ACT Labor wanted it to be so. The federal government was looking for places to cut and the ACT Labor Party said, “Come here and cut the NCA,” with no regard for the impact that that slashing would have on the people of Canberra.

I do need to respond to the Chief Minister’s speech. It really was quite an embarrassing effort. He was so embarrassed at his inability to stand up to Bob Debus, and Peter Garrett, of all people, that he tried to turn the debate back to housing affordability. I am very happy to have a debate about that and about the impact on young families of this government’s actions. That is what the Chief Minister was arguing. The Chief Minister had the hide to do this when, with respect to the government he has led, no government in Canberra’s history has ever had such a negative impact upon young families.

We can look at the closing of 23 schools when we were told there would be no schools closed. We can look at the significant increases in taxes and charges under this government due to their financial mismanagement in the context of a billion-dollar boom. We have seen them deliberately taking car parks away as part of a strategy of forcing people onto buses whilst at the same time slashing their bus services. This is a government that has consistently punished young families. If there is one legacy of the last few years of the Stanhope government, it is that it has hurt young families. And the way it has hurt young families the most is through its deliberate squeeze on land supply which has led to thousands of young Canberra families being forced out of the housing market.

It is absolutely outrageous for the Chief Minister to come in here and try to blame the hardship suffered by young Canberra families on anyone else but himself, his government and their actions. It demonstrates the lengths to which this Chief Minister will go to avoid answering the question about why he is afraid to stand up to his federal colleagues and why he has failed to secure prosperity for young Canberrans.

We now have a double act between ACT Labor and federal Labor. ACT Labor has closed schools, raised taxes, failed to invest in infrastructure and has forced people out of the housing market. On the back of that, we have a federal government that is now going to come and take away people's jobs. That is what is going on here—a double act involving ACT Labor, which has shown no compassion and no regard for the impact of its policies on young families in the territory. Young families can no longer afford to buy homes and are being forced to move over the border in order to buy their homes. We have seen their services taken away and their schools closed. We have seen their water prices go up as the government has failed to invest in infrastructure. We have seen waiting times at our hospitals get longer and longer. This has occurred in the context of a billion-dollar boom and, at the end of that, we have a federal government that is going to come and take away their jobs. Jon Stanhope says it is not his fault; it is someone else's fault.

What an embarrassing statement that was from the Chief Minister. He comes in here and picks a fight about housing affordability and the impact of government policy on young families when his government continues to subject young Canberra families to hardship that would be completely avoidable if this government could actually manage the territory in the way that it should.

If there is one issue on which I welcome a debate in the lead-up to the election, it will be on how this ACT Labor government has attacked young families with its policies. It has caused undue hardship for young families looking to purchase a home. This housing stress has been caused by people having to take on significantly higher mortgages than would otherwise be the case because of this government's deliberate policy of squeezing land supply. There can be no doubt about it: this government controls the land release and it squeezed it. The families of Canberra are still feeling the effects. For the Chief Minister to try and blame anyone but himself, his government's policies and his ministers is absolutely outrageous.

The people of Canberra can see through this. The people of Canberra can do the sums. They know that this government have controlled land release, that they control

development of residential releases and that under this government's policies housing has become less and less affordable. We have seen thousands of Canberrans excluded from the market. This should not be happening. We do not have a land supply crisis. We do not have a shortage of land in the ACT. We have a land management crisis under this government. They have failed to get on with releases in the south. They have been too slow when they have released land in Gungahlin. And now the Chief Minister wants to blame everyone else for the housing stress and for the damage that young families are suffering. He wants to blame the Howard government for that, when it was his government that caused these issues. Now we have a double act: after all these burdens have been imposed, after the services have been cut, after housing has become less affordable, the Rudd government is going to cut their jobs. And what is the response of Stanhope Labor? They are either mute or they are cheerleaders for the very cuts that will then hurt those families who have already been affected by the policies of the ACT Labor Stanhope government.

This was an embarrassing argument that the Chief Minister made. It was a pathetic attempt to divert attention away from the fact that he does not have the courage to stand up to his federal colleagues. He was prepared to pick fights with the Liberal Party when they were in government federally but he is not prepared to take it to his federal Labor colleagues. We can only speculate about the reasons for that. We can only speculate about what kind of future career Jon Stanhope may have in mind which would make it disadvantageous for him to criticise his Labor colleagues. But there is no doubt that he has failed to do so, and his attempt to divert attention today was an embarrassment to him and his party.

Question put:

That the amendment (**Mr Stanhope's**) be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 9

Noes 8

Mr Barr	Mr Hargreaves	Mrs Burke	Mr Seselja
Mr Berry	Ms MacDonald	Mrs Dunne	Mr Smyth
Mr Corbell	Ms Porter	Dr Foskey	Mr Stefaniak
Ms Gallagher	Mr Stanhope	Mr Mulcahy	
Mr Gentleman		Mr Pratt	

Question so resolved in the affirmative.

Amendment agreed to.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Health—asbestos related disease and injury

MS MacDONALD (Brindabella) (5:32): I move the motion standing in my name on the notice paper relating to asbestos related disease and injury:

That this Assembly:

- (1) honours the extraordinary life of anti-asbestos campaigner Bernie Banton;
and
- (2) acknowledges the leading role taken by the ACT Government to minimise the prevalence of asbestos related disease and injury.

On Tuesday, 27 November 2007, long-term campaigner Bernard Douglas Banton died peacefully in his sleep. Better known as Bernie, he was at home and surrounded by his family, exactly as he had wanted. Mr Banton was 61. He died of the asbestos related disease peritoneal mesothelioma.

Mr Banton had a variety of occupations throughout his working life, but the one that dominated his last years was the factory work he did in his 20s. From 1968 to 1974, he worked as a lathe operator, making asbestos pipe sections and shaping blocks of asbestos for use in power stations. His employer was James Hardie & Co, which ran a large factory at Camellia, not far from Parramatta, where he was born and grew up.

Like many other employees, Mr Banton inhaled asbestos fibres at work, not knowing the deadly consequences. At Hardie, they called workers like Mr Banton the snowmen because they were covered from head to toe with the white dust of asbestos used in the manufacture of K-lite. The factory was covered in the dust. When the snowmen walked out, if they did not use the air hose to blow the dust off, all you could see was their eyes.

After leaving Hardie in 1974, Mr Banton undertook a variety of jobs, but it was in 1998, during a family skiing holiday, that he noticed he was having difficulty breathing. Shortly afterwards, he was diagnosed with asbestos related pleural disease, a debilitating but benign condition. He sued Hardie and, after a toughly contested court battle, received \$800,000 in compensation in 2000.

Mr Banton vowed to fight for a compensation fund to be established. Despite the great cost to his deteriorating health, he became the face of the James Hardie compensation case. For the past five years, in his own words, he was “dragged through a pit of hell by a mob of bottom feeders”. As vice-president of the Asbestos Diseases Foundation of Australia, he led the fight to force building product giant James Hardie to establish a \$4 billion fund to compensate thousands of asbestos victims. In a tribute to Mr Banton, the Premier of New South Wales, Morris Iemma, said:

It was his transparent courage, his obvious suffering and his imminent mortality that brought him the affection of so many and gave his campaign the moral firepower that alone could humble a corporate giant and right a gigantic wrong.

Mr Banton has been a constant reminder of the real issue here, the dreadful legacy of the asbestos industry and its terrible human toll. Of the 137 people Mr Banton worked with at James Hardie, only nine were still alive before Mr Banton’s death. With Mr Banton’s death, there are now only eight still alive.

Mr Banton’s three brothers—Albert, Edward and Bruce—also worked at the Camellia Hardie factory. Edward died of mesothelioma in 2001; Albert contracted the less

serious but still life-changing disease asbestosis. Asbestosis is a serious disease. It may take 10 years or more to develop after asbestos exposure. When asbestos fibres stay deep in the lungs, scar tissue forms around them, scarring the lungs, which may lead to disability or even death. The scar tissue stops oxygen moving into the bloodstream, so the person with asbestosis feels out of breath. There are limited measures to improve quality of life. Take Mr Banton's portable oxygen bottle as an example. He used to refer to it as his "baby" because he would not go anywhere without it.

It has been estimated that by 2020, an additional 53,000 people will be affected with an asbestos related disease. Some 13,000 of those people will die of mesothelioma. Mesothelioma is a cancer that is linked with asbestos exposure. There is no proven cure for mesothelioma, which can take 30 or 40 years after exposure to develop. As in Mr Banton's case, if asbestos fibres are breathed into the stomach they may work their way through the stomach wall and cause mesothelioma in the lining of the peritoneum or abdomen. Once diagnosed, sufferers usually die from the disease within a few months.

A true fighter, Mr Banton worked hard for the establishment of the James Hardie compensation fund. When the new trust became operational, he turned his energies to other asbestos issues, including lobbying for government subsidies for the palliative drug Alimta. In January this year, it was announced that Alimta, the only drug available to relieve the symptoms of mesothelioma, will be available on the PBS. The drug can increase sufferers' survival time and improve their quality of life but, at \$20,000 or more for six treatments, has been out of reach for many patients. Now that the drug has been listed on the PBS, sufferers will pay just \$31.30 for each prescription.

Having spoken to an official from the CFMEU yesterday, it is my understanding that there was a petition going around to get Alimta onto the PBS and that a number of the signatures came from here in the ACT. In fact, I think a goodly proportion of signatures came from here in the ACT. That is indicative of how this issue is of concern to people in the ACT. Mr Banton was also instrumental in getting chemotherapy onto the PBS.

The legacy of his campaigning will continue to help thousands of people well into the future. As part of this legacy, the New South Wales government has announced the construction of a \$6.9 million laboratory to research asbestos related diseases at Concord repatriation general hospital. The state-of-the-art facility, to be named the Bernie Banton centre, will be located adjacent to the ANZAC Research Institute and will conduct clinical research into more effective treatment, earlier diagnosis and increased life expectancy for sufferers.

Mr Banton had a particular quality, an Australian stoicism, which allowed him to bring his struggle to the Australian public. No matter how sick, how sore or how sorry, he would be there, fighting for all those who had been affected as he had. He said before his death:

I had walked away from the unions for 30 years but during that campaign—

the Hardie campaign—

I realised we would not have gotten a zack without them.

The former secretary of the ACTU, Greg Combet, paid homage to Mr Banton and to the thousands who had battled within the union movement. He said that Mr Banton was “a continuum of those collective efforts, but something else as well”. He said:

He had a lot of courage. All those things he did in recent years, he did under considerable duress.

Members may recall the huge workers rights rally organised by the ACTU in 2005 in relation to Work Choices—the largest rally since the Vietnam War. Mr Banton called Mr Combet and offered to speak. Mr Combet said that he was an inspiration to the people who have worked fighting for workers’ rights. Bernie Banton was welcomed as a real workers’ hero. Members may also recall that Prime Minister Kevin Rudd used his victory speech to single out Mr Banton. He said:

... mate, you’re not going to be forgotten in this place ...

... when so many ... were prepared to ... cast you to one side, Bernie, you stand out as a beacon and clarion call to us all about what is decent and necessary in life and ... I salute you.

As the former Howard government tried to strip away workers rights, Mr Banton was proof that workers needed protection. Workers can find it difficult to speak up about health and safety issues at work. Mr Speaker, I am sure that you are aware of that, as I am from the amount of time that I spent organising workers in my previous working life. The balance of power does not favour one worker who wants to discuss workplace safety with an employer that can be a large corporate entity.

I would like to say at this point that, just because I say that, it does not mean that I tag all employers with that line; I certainly do not. By far and away the vast majority of employers in this country are trying to do the right thing. But even a group of workers in a small non-unionised workplace can find it difficult to speak out. I saw that time and time again when I was a union organiser.

Workers need to be encouraged to insist on workplace safety. Mr Banton was a shining example of how one worker speaking out can achieve a just outcome for many. Mr Banton knew well that workers often need to join together to get health and safety issues rectified at places of work and that, in focusing on keeping businesses afloat, it is easy for employers to forget about the safety concerns of workers. His example is the strongest evidence of the importance of speaking up, of employees and employers engaging in robust and meaningful dialogue to achieve life-changing—indeed lifesaving—outcomes.

Mr Banton was instrumental in raising awareness about the suffering and needs of asbestos victims. The Stanhope government has worked hard to promote the safe removal and disposal of asbestos and to minimise the prevalence of asbestos related

disease and injury. The ACT Asbestos Assessment Task Force was established in 2004 under the Dangerous Substances Act. The task force's main objective was to analyse the extent and impact of asbestos in the ACT and report back to the industrial relations minister. The ACT government agreed in principle to all of the recommendations of the task force report and has since implemented a new framework for managing asbestos in the ACT. Awareness campaigns featuring prominent TV personality Don Burke are being run and Canberrans have been provided with information about safe asbestos removal and disposal and their legal responsibilities.

In 2007 new laws were introduced for non-residential buildings. The laws affect anyone who owns a building or who makes decisions about its management. The first deadline for compliance is September this year. The new laws will require owners to obtain a report from a licensed asbestos assessor identifying the location and condition of any asbestos in the building and then prepare and pull into action a written asbestos management plan. This must include an asbestos register that can be made available to tenants, workers, contractors and any other relevant people. It also needs to include an action timetable for the control measures and a procedure for review. The review must take place at least every five years. These new laws will alert any relevant person associated with the premises if asbestos is present and where it is located.

Most of us in here know—we have talked about it before—that when asbestos is contained in a bonded form, maintained in good condition and left alone it presents no health risks. But when the asbestos fibres are released into the air and breathed in, we know that there can be serious, if not fatal, health implications. That is why it is so important that anyone working on a premises, or long-term occupants and tenants, are aware of or appropriately qualified to handle asbestos. By taking the right precautions, the generation and inhalation of dust during activities that may disturb materials containing asbestos will be reduced.

The government is committed to minimising the prevalence of asbestos related diseases in the future. We will continue to carry on Bernie Banton's legacy. Mr Banton never stopped fighting for fair and just compensation. Just days before his death, he won a confidential payout as compensation for his terminal mesothelioma. Mr Banton's lawyer, Tanya Segelov, said that the case was a first for the \$4 billion James Hardie compensation fund. Mr Banton was simply selfless in his fight for justice for all asbestos victims, not just for himself but for the families of many of his workmates who had died from asbestos related disease without compensation.

Those of us who were in this place before the 2004 election will remember that when we were debating the legislation to do with asbestos Mr Banton came down and sat in the gallery. I remember him sitting in the gallery with his wife. I know that a former member in this place, Mrs Cross, was involved in asking him to come down, but I also mention Elizabeth Thurbon, who raised the issue with a number of members in this place, and, I think, Carol Willie—I am getting a nod from Roland—who would have dealt with her as well. That is my recollection, and I would like to put them on the record as having been involved.

Articulate, passionate and with an impressive grasp of the nuances of evidence, Bernie Banton achieved national prominence as the face of the working people battling a sophisticated international company. Our sympathy is with his wife, Karen, five children and 11 grandchildren. His legacy will live on and he will always be remembered. I commend the motion to the Assembly.

MR STEFANIAK (Ginninderra) (5.48): In supporting the motion, I foreshadow that I will move what I think is a pretty fair enhancement of it. I agree with what Ms MacDonald said in relation to the late Bernie Banton. He was certainly inspirational. He tragically contracted the disease when he was in his 20s; it is a killer disease.

Karin MacDonald mentions a number of other people, including Elizabeth Thurbon, whose husband suffered from the disease. I know the Thurbons very well. Elizabeth's brother-in-law Kim and I played rugby. Her father-in-law used to drive us all round in the painters' kombi van when we were about 14 or 15. Elizabeth Thurbon was one of the ones who saw me.

The Assembly has done a lot in terms of asbestos and asbestos related diseases—not just in 2004; we go right back. Mr Speaker, you and I would be the only ones who would remember this: in the first Assembly, when there were some serious concerns about asbestos in roofs in terms of insulation, I think it was your government—the first Assembly government back in 1989—that started a program which had the support of the Assembly in relation to taking asbestos out of roofs. That was something which took a number of years to do, but it was done effectively. The logical extension of that—

MR SPEAKER: And \$90 million, wasn't it?

MR STEFANIAK: It was a lot of money. We might have got something out of the federal government. Anyway, that was quite historic. It started a pretty proud tradition in this Assembly in terms of an awareness of what asbestos can do to you.

That continues to this day. Only a few months ago, a friend of mine rang up. That was Bernadette O'Shaughnessy, who was a lieutenant at OCTU when I was on the staff at 2 Training Group. There was a Joe Kipper who was an ex-regular army warrant officer who was on staff there. She was concerned that other people who served at the time might have contracted asbestos as a result of the old World War II huts we worked in. I do not think I have, but poor old Joe died as a result of asbestosis, and it could well have been from that time at Bardia Barracks at Ingleburn.

It is a very nasty disease—a disease that people are still coming to appreciate. That is where Bernie Banton was so important. He was the front man who brought to the attention of the Australian public just how dangerous asbestos actually is. I do not think that people appreciated that until he really got going. He was an absolute inspiration to many people. Many people got on the bandwagon as a result, and that had a great effect in the ACT. He inspired people like Elizabeth Thurbon and her family, who had suffered, to get involved.

I pay tribute to Helen Cross. I now come to my amendment, which would simply omit the word “Government” from paragraph 2 and substitute the word “Assembly”. I move:

Omit the word “Government” in paragraph (2), substitute “Assembly”.

As I have already said, this is something the whole Assembly has been involved in, and pretty well unanimously, from 1989 onwards—a period that you and I are well aware of, Mr Speaker—through to 2004, when Helen Cross initially brought in a bill. I recall detailed consultations between then Minister Bill Wood, myself, Helen and—who else did we have in the Assembly then?—Ros Dundas. All groups were involved in this.

There was a bit of argy-bargy. Government officials were naturally worried about it going a bit too far, but we came up with something which was fairly reasonable. A task force was set up. Bill Wood chaired that after he left the Assembly; he did not stand at the end of 2004. That might have wound it back slightly. There were some concerns in relation to some of the legislation perhaps going too far, but it was groundbreaking legislation and it was legislation that fundamentally has stood the test of time. The task force made some recommendations which were accepted by the Assembly in either 2005 or 2006.

I do not think that anyone opposed any of this. The leading role taken by the Assembly—and it is the Assembly as a whole, not just the government—probably occurred initially as a result of the initiative of Helen Cross, but then we all got together. As I said, it was very much a case where there were some compromises, but legislation which everyone could agree to was ultimately agreed to. That was substantially different from the initial approach the government was taking.

In fairness to people such as Helen Cross, Ros Dundas, the opposition at the time and the government, who all worked together, it would be more appropriate if we took out the word “Government” and put in “Assembly”; it is something that we have all worked on and something that we can all be very, very proud of. It was something that Bernie Banton was very happy with when he came down here in 2004 and saw the debate. He was certainly happy that people in the ACT affected by asbestos, such as the Thurbons, were very happy with the role taken by everyone here. It was a very happy ending.

There was some tweaking done as a result of the committee Bill Wood headed, but that seems to have satisfied pretty well everyone, including some of the people in some sectors who are a little wary about it going too far. That has not eventuated. It is something that we can all be proud of.

I ask that my amendment be supported because it more truly reflects what occurred. It is not every day that we all contribute in a non-partisan way to a good cause, but that is something that occurred here. Accordingly, I think my amendment is a better reflection of the situation. We support the motion. It is very important to honour the extraordinary life of anti-asbestos campaigner Bernie Banton, the other people who have supported him, and the other sufferers—indeed, people who continue to suffer.

MR HARGREAVES (Brindabella—Minister for Territory and Municipal Services, Minister for Housing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (5.54): I will speak to the amendment and the motion. I wish to support Ms MacDonald's motion on a number of levels, and I welcome her initiative in bringing this matter forward.

What we are seeing here is recognition of one of the true heroes in modern Australian life. He is a fellow who knew absolutely that he was going to die—absolutely knew it. He knew what from and he knew what caused it. The less strong of us would go away, sit in a black room and just do it, but Bernie Banton did not do that. He went out and used himself as a shield for other people who may get this disease in the future. He went out there and strove for justice for the people who had suffered this fate because of the ignorance of others—or in some cases the deliberate hiding of the effects of asbestosis from people. It is necessary that we pay a tribute to Bernie Banton for the crusade that he went on. It also provides a salutary lesson about the things that are dangerous that we know about in the industrial arena. This is another reason why we need to support this motion.

I thank Ms MacDonald for bringing this motion forward. I want to recognise her ongoing commitment to safe workplaces and all the work that she has done. I commend the motion to the Assembly.

DR FOSKEY (Molonglo) (5.56): Here we have an example of the cooperation that can exist when we all have the same view. In this case, I will be supporting Mr Stefaniak's amendment: I am well aware that, while it is the government that implements the policy, the legislation came out of action across the Assembly. I want to make sure that people acknowledge that the former Greens MLA Kerrie Tucker had something to do with it.

The legislation came out of the last days of the minority Stanhope government. Let us admit that it was not government action that got it happening. It was then independent Helen Cross who caught the asbestos waves, and she had good reason to: a family member had suffered an asbestos related disease, and an election was approaching and she might not have any further opportunities to act on the matter—and did not, as it turned out.

The government had to negotiate with the crossbench and the opposition of the time. The offer from the government was to put it off until after the 2004 election, by when more work would have been done and there would be less urgency. The crossbench, including my predecessor, stuck by the commitment to move on asbestos then and there, although Kerrie did support the ACT government's more considered approach. Mrs Cross had proposed the requirement that an asbestos inspection be conducted on all houses, with the result included in sales documentation, giving rise to a number of costs and practicality concerns, including the fear that responsibility could be shifted from the manufacturer—Hardie—to the inspector. The Cross model was not particularly thought through when it came to commercial buildings either.

Anyway, the pressure of an impending election and the possibility that the ACT government was going to be pushed into a contentious structure concentrated minds

wonderfully, and the relevant parts of the ACT bureaucracy came up with some quick and innovative thinking. It was agreed that one of the outcomes would be an asbestos task force and that information coming from that task force would be used to finetune the legislation before it came into effect. It is interesting to note that European research has found that minority governments produce better health and economic outcomes than majoritarian governments—and here is an instance; this legislation is an example of that.

One of the practical adjustments in establishing the asbestos inspection, reporting and safety duties was to allow sellers to remain silent when concrete information about asbestos products in their properties is not known. That was because government took the view that an obligation to inspect all buildings for asbestos and produce a report could create more problems than it would address.

I would be interested to learn from the government if asbestos reports are being prepared but not furnished when properties are sold; if property owners are avoiding inspecting their properties because of the fear of onerous safety duties; and if the benefits to the education program, an important part of the asbestos regime, is still proving effective—

At 6.00 pm, in accordance with standing order 34, the debate was interrupted and the resumption of the debate made an order of the day for the next sitting. The motion for the adjournment of the Assembly was put.

Adjournment

Schools—closures

MRS DUNNE (Ginninderra) (6.00): Mr Speaker, in the last couple of weeks I have spent considerable time in my electorate, specifically in the suburbs of Cook and Flynn, catching up with my constituents in those suburbs to try and gauge their views and their reaction to school closures in those suburbs. As you would know, Mr Speaker, the Flynn primary school closed at the end of 2006 and Cook primary school closed at the end of 2007. It is pretty safe to say that the level of discontent and dissatisfaction in the community has not died down, even in Flynn more than a year after the closure of that school. It is not just people who had children at the schools or who thought that they might send their children to those schools—it is a top-of-mind issue with every person that I spoke to in Flynn, and it is a top-of-mind issue with every person I spoke to in Cook.

The things that they report to me are that they are very unhappy about the so-called consultation process. They do not believe that the decisions made were based on the facts of what was happening in their suburbs. They have not been given a sufficient reason for why these schools closed. Both those schools had rising school populations. It is interesting to reflect on the fact that some of the children affected by the Cook school closure have gone to Aranda. Aranda had to take on demountable classrooms to accommodate the students that came from Cook. It is also interesting to reflect on the 1990s when there were school closures proposed in the ACT, and the fact that one of the schools proposed for closure along with Cook was Aranda, which was a very small school at the time. Now it is a school which is literally bursting at the seams.

It is interesting to reflect on the fact that through 2007 the government—when I talk about the government, I talk about both the ministers and the bureaucrats—really do not seem to have learnt anything about the process. The lack of preparation for school closures at the end of 2006 was a huge sore point, and the transition for children at the beginning of 2007 was, in many cases, very badly handled. We are still reaping the results of that today. But the really sad thing is that in talking to parents it is clear that it did not get any better the second time around. The minister for education promised a seamless transition.

I will give some examples of that seamless transition. For the children who moved from Cook to Aranda, so it would not be too difficult, their parents decided that they would actually start negotiations well in advance in terms 3 and 4 last year. They started having meetings with senior officials in the department of education and the senior leadership at Aranda primary school. A whole lot of arrangements were made and agreed upon about how to handle this influx of children from a school that would be closed and how to deal with that sensitively. That was all very good, this was all agreed to, but what happened? Through no fault of anyone, the person principally responsible for the arrangements at Aranda primary school—the principal—resigned over the Christmas period and went into retirement. There was no handover. No-one told these people ahead of time that this was going to happen, and there was no handling of these children coming from Cook.

They arrived on the first day of school to find that most of the things that had been agreed upon had not been put in place. Unbeknownst to any of them, the new principal had come in and made some policy changes about which the Cook parents had not been alerted because they were not on the school mailing distribution list. They were the parents of new students and they were not told. All of the students turned up and found that they were going to composite classes. The parents were not prepared for that and they did not have the opportunity to prepare their children for the fact that they would be going into composite classes.

The parents from Cook say to me, “We had electronic whiteboards in every classroom in our school and my children have gone to a school where that is not the case. We had shade covering over our playground and our children are now going to a place where that is not the case, and we have to say to our children that they are better off under the Stanhope government’s *Towards 2020* proposal.” The children in Cook know that they are not. The parents in Cook and Flynn know that their children are not better off because of *Towards 2020*.

Gender and climate change

DR FOSKEY (Molonglo) (6.05): Following my theme for International Women’s Day, I want to talk today about gender and climate change. I think everyone knows—certainly Mr Stanhope does—that climate change is an equity as well as an environmental issue. We know that the poor and those with least influence at national and global levels will feel the strongest impacts. For instance, the Pacific Islands are already feeling the effects, but their only hope of influencing the global agenda and the post-Kyoto arrangements is through the influence of larger powers. This is where

Australia has a particular role, because the Pacific Islands themselves, even when they group together in the Pacific Island commission, just do not have the capacity to influence discussions.

It is also a well-known fact that women are overly represented amongst the poor. The United Nations uses a figure of 70 per cent, and we could give or take a percentage there. Nonetheless, that is a generally accepted figure these days. Why is that? Why am I talking about gender? The reason is that women, in their traditional roles, have responsibility for caring for the most vulnerable in most societies. That is not just in Australian society, where perhaps that is less of a traditional role, and it is not just the most vulnerable, because, as they say, behind every powerful man is usually a woman. Therefore, women have to clean up the mess; women have to gather the fuel; women have to get the water. We know that women have to walk many kilometres in many countries in the world just to get a bucket of water, which is their sole allowance for the day.

Consequently, when the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations issued a statement entitled “Women must participate in all aspects of the climate change debate”, I wanted to have a look at how ACT women were affected. I was fortunate, because the ACT government recently commissioned some research. Fortunately it is one of the few bits of data that is gender disaggregated. I was able to see the relative positions of women to men on a number of issues. I have not got time, unfortunately, to go into all of these—I might get time on another occasion perhaps—but I would commend this research to members.

In the ACT, for instance, women were more concerned about sustainability issues—91 per cent to 81 per cent; they were more likely to compost food and garden refuse—67 to 59 per cent; they were more likely to avoid plastic bags—86 to 77 per cent. Of course, to some extent this reflects the traditional role of women where women are more likely to be doing the shopping and to be in the kitchen dealing with food wastes, but the sustainability issue is an interesting one.

The research continues: women are less likely to take steps to reduce car use. That, of course, is probably due to the children factor and the fact that they have to go to many places on each trip. They are more likely to take shorter showers—86 per cent to 68 per cent; they are more likely to reuse laundry and shower water—72 to 50 per cent—and we know why that is, don't we; they are more likely to check soil moisture before watering—50 per cent to 36 per cent; they are more likely to take materials to Revolve or Aussie Junk—67 per cent to 44 per cent; they are more likely to feel a personal responsibility to do the right thing—85 per cent to 75 per cent; and they are more likely to consider cost a barrier to living sustainably—42 per cent to 28 per cent.

On it goes, Mr Speaker. Both men and women are equally concerned about climate change, but women are more likely to believe that human activity contributes a lot to climate change—76 per cent to 71 per cent; and women are also more likely to believe that the government should enforce actions to decrease greenhouse gas emissions of business and individuals—96 per cent to 91 per cent. Women were less aware of ways to address climate change than men, but they were more willing to change their behaviour to decrease climate change.

National Electrical and Communications Association

MR GENTLEMAN (Brindabella) (6.10): Last week I had the pleasure of representing the ACT government at the opening of the new offices of the National Electrical and Communications Association, or NECA, in Fyshwick. NECA is the only national industry association that represents contractors responsible for the delivery of electrical, voice and data communication systems in Australia. According to their website, they have approximately 4,000 businesses members, which employ approximately 50,000 tradespeople. While NECA provides a multitude of services for its members and, through that, the community, it is their focus on training and development I wish to talk about today.

I was pleased to see the opening of the new offices in Fyshwick that represent a great commitment to the territory and regional business. To have such an influential organisation providing a solid base in the nation's capital will only further assist in addressing the skills shortage that we are currently facing. NECA's involvement with the federal government has been quite extensive in providing valuable information about the skills shortage. The association has issued publications like "A report on the skills shortage in electrotechnology" and a report entitled "Electrotechnology and data communications—licensing, the ageing workforce", and it is these efforts shown by people involved directly in the industry that must be supported and encouraged.

With NECA expanding their organisation into the ACT, it can only yield positive outcomes for the community. I mentioned at the launch last week that the ACT government has implemented a number of policies in recent years focusing on creating opportunities for business growth and development. Just as important is the focus on providing development of trade training, something that the National Electrical and Communications Association has played a major role in. That major role has extended to its group apprenticeship businesses and its support for school-based training and also their links with CIT in Canberra. I do hope that this relationship will go even further. It is through this training that we hope to provide the right support for those wishing to enter the workforce in the trade environment.

The members of this Assembly are aware of my passion for environmental issues and, in particular, sustainable development. To achieve sustainable development, we require a focus on a diverse range of factors, including future training needs. NECA's involvement in renewable energy issues as illustrated through their ecosmart electricians course and their support for energy-saving components in the building industry have gone a long way to achieving that goal. It is through these measures that we can assist in the transition to a fully sustainable development area.

The ACT government is taking an active approach to encouraging sustainable development through measures outlined in its climate change strategy, weathering the change. It is important that industry take the initiative to actively look at procedures and mechanisms within their own areas that they can improve with regard to sustainable development. That is exactly what NECA is setting out to achieve, and I commend them for that.

I am also pleased to see the rising numbers in local youth and mature age people being employed in areas where there are shortages of qualified tradespersons. I am pleased to see the support and encouragement that NECA is providing through their other initiatives to those looking at future trade careers. NECA's national awards of excellence, national apprenticeship awards and secondary schools awards are a testament to their commitment to the cause.

I would like to thank the New South Wales and ACT chief executive, Lindsay Le Compte, the New South Wales president, Steve Griffiths, and the ACT president, Greg Kempton, for the invitation to the launch. I look forward, as I am sure all members here today do as well, to seeing the positive results of such an important organisation.

St Vincent de Paul Housing—public

MR PRATT (Brindabella) (6.14): Mr Speaker, I want to talk about two matters: firstly, St Vincent de Paul and their community assistance. I want to particularly talk about Vinnie's road patrol. I joined them last night for their Tuesday night patrol which they conduct in the city. I joined with Peter Sutton, who is the coordinator of the Tuesday night patrol, and his four volunteers. They volunteer on the basis of one night a month, so they have a pretty good array of volunteers. The Vinnie's patrol on Tuesdays sets up at the back of the Canberra Centre and they sit there from about 7.20 until about 8.20 for an hour or so and give sustenance and assistance and a meal to people who are down and out. They come from around the city and meet with the patrol at that particular place. That patrol then moves on and sets up again around in Garema Place at the junction with the bus interchange and stays there for about another hour or so. It is a very, very good service and I was very impressed with what I saw last night.

The patrol has a new vehicle; it is a four-seater cab utility with a little mobile kitchen established on the back. It is very efficient, and they just lay things out. That particular vehicle was recently purchased through funds from the Paul Newman Foundation, which provides funding to St Vincent de Paul. Other groups that contribute to the running of that patrol include Canberra Milk, ActewAGL, the Southern Cross Club and there are a number of others as well. It was a pretty impressive patrol. I saw eight customers at the back of the Canberra Centre. These people were in dire straits, and I was certainly very pleased to see that patrol.

The second matter I wish to raise runs on the back of that. One of the customers of the patrol was a tenant from the housing commission complex located adjacent to the Canberra Centre. He told me quite a horrific story, and this chap was in quite a bad way. I have passed on the details of his story to Mrs Burke and Mr Stefaniak to take up with the government to confirm or deny what this particular fellow has said. The facts as he told me are that there is allegedly a serial offender tenant in the complex who has been making life in that complex hell for everybody. He has been a problem over many, many, many months, including, allegedly, in recent times throwing a Molotov cocktail at a single mother's flat and damaging her two-year-old daughter's bedroom. If the facts are as he has told me, then that is a pretty serious matter.

According to this man's story, it took the police six weeks to catch the offender. When he was not given a custodial sentence, he returned to the complex. One question is why that would be the case and another is why, after so many months of complaints by tenants to ACT housing, would he then come back and reoccupy that flat to carry on with his bullying and quite violent behaviour. I would have thought throwing a Molotov cocktail showed fairly clear intent to cause severe damage and injury and perhaps risk killing somebody in the process.

Having raised that apparently serious matter, I will leave it with my colleagues. I will reserve my judgement until the various government ministers respond. I guess it begs the question of whether the stories we hear about the management of government housing are true in terms of whether the government is failing to exercise a duty of care to the majority of tenants who live in these places who are law-abiding citizens but who have to put up with this fringe element who, out of all proportion, are quite dangerous and upsetting. This particular man I saw last night has had a bad time. Why can he not just settle down and regather his life without having to put up with those sorts of threats? That is the fundamental question.

International Youth Week Housing—public

MR MULCAHY (Molonglo) (6.19): I would like to use my time in tonight's adjournment debate to comment on the visit to the Legislative Assembly of the World Youth Day Cross and Icon last Tuesday, 26 February. The cross has been touring the country since 1 July 2007 and will, before World Youth Day in July this year, go through every diocese in every state and territory in Australia. I was pleased to see quite a good sized crowd gathered to greet the cross last week and to be able to listen to His Grace Archbishop Coleridge, Archbishop of the Canberra and Goulburn Diocese, greet and bless the cross. I also acknowledge that the Chief Minister, the Leader of the Opposition, Mrs Dunne, Mrs Burke, Mr Smyth and I were in attendance.

It is worth putting on the record in this place a little bit of background to this iconic journey ahead of World Youth Day. The cross itself is 3.8 metres high and was built in 1983. It was originally placed near the main altar of St Peter's Basilica in the Vatican before it was gifted by the late Pope John Paul II as a symbol of Christ's love for humanity. His Holiness the Pope said at the time:

My dear young people, at the conclusion of the Holy Year, I entrust to you the sign of this Jubilee Year: the Cross of Christ! Carry it throughout the world as a symbol of Christ's love for humanity, and announce to everyone that only in the death and resurrection of Christ can we find salvation and redemption.

Since 1984, the cross has travelled around the world, including trips behind the Iron Curtain during the cold war and to every continent. The tradition of undertaking a year-long journey around the diocese of the host nation of International World Youth Day began in 1994. The cross is accompanied on its journey by the icon of Our Lady, Salus Populi Romani, a contemporary copy of the sacred and ancient icon housed in the St Mary Major Basilica.

The tour is a major logistical effort that affords Australians in cities, towns and remote outback spots the chance to share in this significant and holy occasion. World Youth Day itself is an important event that will see hundreds of thousands of people converge on Sydney, and a significant number will also be coming to Canberra. During the last World Youth Day held in Cologne, Germany, there were 435 registered pilgrims from some 197 countries, 800 bishops and cardinals and 7,000 international journalists in attendance. I was amazed to discover, when researching World Youth Day, that an incredible 1.2 million people attended the final mass.

This year's event promises to be equally significant and will provide hundreds of thousands of Christians from Australia and abroad the opportunity to express and celebrate their faith. I understand that it will be the largest event held in Sydney since the 2000 Olympics, and it promises to be a wonderful occasion. It will also mark the first visit to this country of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI.

I am sure a great many Canberrans will be travelling to World Youth Day in July and that many of the pilgrims will be coming to Canberra, where I know they will be billeted by families in this community. I would like to take this opportunity to wish all the very best to those who do come to Australia and to those who are involved in the organisation. I hope that the occasion is every bit as fulfilling as they are no doubt hoping.

I will also just touch on another matter that relates to an issue I raised in question time today—that is, public housing. There was some derision uttered from the opposition about this possibly being a question written by the minister. Far from that, in fact, I have conducted shopping centre meetings over the last couple of weeks in Red Hill, Griffith and Kingston, and I have experienced a large number of complaints from public housing tenants and other residents of those communities about antisocial and violent conduct. Those people are quite distressed, and they would not take kindly to seeing their concerns be made light of today as though some sort of dorothea dixie was being put up.

Last Saturday morning I was surrounded by people at Red Hill shops who came there specifically to talk to me. They cited the problems they experienced. Some of them were people living independently in Red Hill and others were living in a public housing complex. They spoke of intimidation. I was told by shopkeepers that drug dealing had gone on just 30 minutes before I and my campaign helpers arrived. They are completely frustrated and distressed by these matters. I have put questions on notice about some of the experiences I heard of in Griffith. I know there are not simple solutions, but people are reaching the point where they have had enough of violent, antisocial behaviour, people torching places, people intimidating older residents who are too terrified to leave their homes, people inflicting vandalism and violence on others and people engaging in drug selling in areas close to Canberra in broad daylight.

Schools—closures

MS PORTER (Ginninderra) (6.24): Mr Speaker, I was listening to Mrs Dunne before, and I just want to mention that since I commenced my regular mobile offices again on

the first weekend of February I have conducted 12 mobile offices in my electorate, totalling in excess of 22 hours. I letterboxed the whole suburb of Flynn to tell people exactly when and where I would be. I was in Charnwood for two hours and provided eight other opportunities in suburban shops nearby—that is in the particular suburbs that Mrs Dunne mentioned. I have been letterboxing the particular suburbs in which I was conducting my mobile offices as well as adjoining suburbs, and I need to say that my experience is quite contrary to Mrs Dunne's.

Although I have had some representations from people about their children going to different schools, overall the issues have not been of a negative nature. Although, of course, a small number have been negative, even these have been represented to me by those parents in a constructive manner. Mainly, and overwhelmingly, I have had positive feedback. In fact, at least one Flynn parent specifically rang my office to let me know how happy she is with her children going to Charnwood-Dunlop primary school and how she would not return her children to Flynn if it reopened. I have had other positive feedback of this nature and reports of quite a large number of children who have gone to Macquarie primary school and how well they are settling in. To say the feeling out there is still the same as it was at the height of the consultation period and immediately after the decisions were made by this government cannot be sustained by my experience. I, too, spend a lot of time in the suburbs of my electorate, and I, too, can compare approaches made to me over that time.

I know this has been a very difficult time for parents and children, and it was a difficult challenge for this government. However, I am proud to be a member of this government with its wonderful commitment to excellence in public education. I am proud to be part of a government that is facing the ongoing challenges of the 21st century.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

The Assembly adjourned at 6.27 pm.